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Preparing to Welcome You in Chicago

WHILE YOU WILL BE READING this issue, ISNA staff, the Convention Program Committee (CPC) and ISNA friends in Chicago are fervently putting the final touches to welcome attendees from across North America.

The upcoming event is a landmark moment, the 60th year of ISNA's founding as a student body. It has grown and continues to blossom forth.

In keeping with this year's Convention theme, "Sixty Years of Service: Navigating the Way Forward," the CPC has come up with a convention program with a dual purpose in sight.

We look forward to hosting you in Chicago this Labor Day weekend.

In May, more than 300 educators gathered in Chicago for ISNA's 24th Educational Forum. With a theme focusing on enriching students' lives, teachers and administrators from across the country learned about various topics in curriculum, Islamic studies, Arabic, and leadership. The highlight of the celebration banquet was the enthusiastic Keynote Speaker, Nabeela Syed, the first Muslim and youngest-ever member of the Illinois State Legislature.

In April, Islamic Horizons welcomed Kiran Ansari as assistant editor. She has a rich background in the field and will add to the magazine's offerings.

A reality exists and, in this issue, we talk about it: single parenting. Whatever the reasons may be but more than often, in the Muslim community, single mothers and fathers feel stigmatized. While the acceptance may be improving slightly, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. The community needs to invest time and money in creating special programs specifically for single parents. We need more support from the *mimbars* (pulpit) and stories about brave single parents in Islamic history.


Fawzia Mai Tung takes us on a wonderful journey to the birthplace of apples.

Or should we say, the real apple! Taking an arduous journey, she examines many aspects and offers her observation that commercial apple orchards causing a natural crossing of cultivated and wild apples, threaten Eastern Kazakhstan's centuries-old natural fruit.

It may surprise many of us that the tentacles of Hindu caste discrimination have been spreading in the United States. Shakeel Syed shares that unable to exercise their right to protest in India, the caste-oppressed Dalits – the lowest in the caste system — in the U.S. have started speaking up against the age-old discrimination and oppression. American and Canadian cities and states are moving forward to confront this violative system. The state of California became the latest when Aisha Wahab, a refugee from Afghanistan and a first-time elected California Senator, successfully advanced her bill SB-403 out of the State Senate voting 34-1 to ban caste-based discrimination.

Lisa Kahler shares that Islamic presence south of the border is much larger than many may assume. She talks about the cross border support for the growing Latino Muslim community and how institutions based in Southern California are working in a variety of ways to support Latino Muslims.

The trials and tribulations of Muslims living in Muslim states continue. Tunisia is one such example. Monia Mazigh tells us what pain the police state is casting on its people.

Prof. Khaled A. Beydoun states that the recent wave of optimism surrounding new Saudi-Iran relations demands a critical examination that transcends the surface-level narrative of reconciliation. While it is tempting to view the thawing of tensions as a positive development for regional stability, a closer look reveals underlying motives and complexities that warrant skepticism. 

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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ISNA GEARS UP TO CELEBRATE 60 YEARS!

Exciting Things Planned for September Convention in Chicago

SIX DECADES OF BRINGING THE community together is no small feat. From humble beginnings in 1963, today ISNA is a household name in North America. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims and neighbors from other faiths have attended the popular annual convention over the years.

But this year from September 1-4, brace yourself for a jam-packed weekend of spirituality, civic engagement, entertainment - and of course food and shopping. From matrimonial services and basketball tournaments to an art and film festival, ISNA aims to provide activities for all ages and interests.

“60 Years of Service: Navigating the Way Forward” is the theme of the convention this year. The focus is two-fold: celebrating the accomplishments of the last six decades and planning for the future. ISNA recognizes that it would not have grown today without the sacrifices and hard work of its founders and successors. However, at

the same time, we need to look at our current landscape and figure out how to continue serving the growing Muslim community in the future.

“With the grace of God and support from our community, ISNA has ably served the community for 60 years, and we are ready to embark on our journey for the next 60,” said Basharat Saleem, the executive director of ISNA. “In this time, our needs have evolved, but ISNA’s mission has been — and will be — to serve our community. We are undergoing a strategic planning process and nationwide surveys to better understand these needs.”

Saleem is spearheading the convention planning with regular meetings, steering

committee coordination, and other preparations. “Every year, we try to take it up a notch, so we are hoping more people join us this Labor Day weekend in Chicago. In 2022, due to COVID-19, we weren’t sure if we would be able to have an in-person convention, so we couldn’t plan in advance. But this year, we got the ball rolling much sooner, and we cannot wait to share the programming with you,” he added.

ISNA has invited Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai and the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim. The highlight of the convention is always the star-studded panel of speakers that inspire, enlighten, and rejuvenate our mind and soul. Some of the confirmed speakers for the 60th Convention include family favorites Dr. Yasir Qadhi, Imam Zaid Shakir, and Shaykh Abdul Nasir Jangda. Among the amazing female speakers, ISNA has confirmed Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Ustadha Ieasha Prime, Dalia Mogahed, and Dr. Rania Awaad.





SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

“We are coordinating with Chi-Care in Chicago to hopefully have a huge service project during the Convention,” said Tabasum Ahmad, Convention Project Manager. “We are finalizing the details to try to be able to feed 60,000 homeless people with a food packaging or distribution drive. Keeping with the 60th anniversary theme, we will also have 60 raffles so there will be lots of opportunities to go home with prizes.”

Another new exhibit planned for the


60th convention is an Afghan art gallery. With the recent influx of refugees, ISNA is coordinating with a local artist to showcase their resettlement journey through art. He might even be able to have a hands-on kite making workshop!

While the ISNA Board and staff always tries to bring new ideas to the convention, they are also happy to repeat events that were a big hit in the past. For instance, they received great feedback about the robotics program last year. So they have invited the

Texas company again. Ditto for the fashion show. Women enjoyed seeing the diverse styles and fabrics from different parts of the Muslim world.

ISNA recognizes that its convention is attended by Muslims from all walks of life. Some are looking to increase their religious knowledge. Some are looking for spouses and others wish to network with like minded individuals. If viable, ISNA is also planning a career and entrepreneurship event so people can network and find better job opportunities and leads for their business. During the virtual conventions due to the pandemic, they had speakers who are Muslim founders or CEOs of large companies like Edible Arrangements and Ethan Allen.

If you are interested in adding value to ISNA's 60th Convention with a live cooking demonstration, calligraphy workshop, men's fashion show, or any other ideas, send your proposals to convention@isna.net. Let the ISNA team know as soon as possible what you can bring to the table.

At press time, there are several other plans in the pipeline. The shape and form of some of the events may change by September depending on various factors. However, rest assured this is going to be a convention you will remember for years, *in sha Allah.* 



EXPERIENCE ISNA'S TRANSFORMATIVE CONVENTION FOR 2023

Celebrating achievement, commitment, and empowerment of six decades

BY RASHEED RABBI

DO YOU CARE TO COMMEMORATE A defining moment of Muslim Americans and honor their unwavering commitment spanning over 60 years? Are you ready to embark on an exciting journey with us, delving into the humble origin of a modest Muslim graduate student-led organization that has blossomed into an influential force to shape the very fabric of North American Muslim communities?

Brace yourselves to be amazed as ISNA unravels its inspiring story of championing

unity, tolerance, and understanding, bridging the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For 60 years, ISNA had stood tall as an unparalleled beacon of hope, inspiring Muslim communities not only within North America but across the continents. As the Labor Day weekend approaches, we are graced with an unprecedented occasion to bear witness to Muslim communities' profound dedication for six decades and celebrate with them.

ISNA invites all of you, our esteemed guests, to attend this historic celebration

to partake in an event that will etch itself into the annals of history. Join us as we gather to commemorate, and pay tribute to the tireless efforts and profound dedication of Muslim Americans. Be moved, inspired, and forever changed with ISNA's commendable vision.

Founded in 1963, ISNA has emerged as a cornerstone in shaping the Muslim American identity. Although initially named MSA (Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada) for tactical reasons, its foresight and vision were the same — all encompassing — aiming for the





“betterment of the Muslim community and society at large” within North America, as noted in its constitution. With tireless efforts and tremendous growth in the following 20 years, in July 1983, ISNA emerged from MSA as an umbrella organization in North America to foster religious and civic engagement, construct bridges of understanding, and reach out to individuals of diverse faiths and backgrounds. As new generations of activists and leaders assume their roles, ISNA remains steadfast in honoring the visionary founders and early pioneers who have guided its path since its inception, admiring and respecting their foresight and dedication.

So, this diamond jubilee is a deserving and defining moment for ISNA. It extends a cordial invitation to all to engage in reflecting the struggles and sacrifices of the past, embracing the victories and triumphs of the present, and forging ahead into the future with unyielding hope and profound gratitude. This occasion seeks to inspire and uplift, reaffirming our collective commitment to the all-encompassing and enduring mission of ISNA, and instilling optimism in the boundless potential that lies ahead. Don't miss such an experience of transformation through commemoration, as we honor our shared history and lay the foundation for an even brighter future.

While the Rosemont Convention Center in Chicago may be a common venue for



regular convention attendees, the CPC (Convention Program Committee), comprising several past presidents and founding members, is committed to offer an uncommon and captivating experience for audiences of all walks of life. Whether you are a young Muslim seeking a wellspring of inspiration, a seasoned activist eager to forge new connections, or simply yearning to immerse yourself in the comforting embrace of faith, this convention promises to leave an indelible mark.

Drawing inspiration from the central theme of “Sixty Years of Service: Navigating

the Way Forward,” the CPC has meticulously crafted the design of the 60th convention with a dual purpose in mind. Firstly, it aims to facilitate a collective expression of heartfelt gratitude towards the predecessors who have consistently demonstrated unwavering commitment and made significant contributions. This endeavor seeks to engender a shared sense of excitement among all participants for ISNA's successes and triumphs, while highlighting the organization's maturity, longstanding presence, and noteworthy achievements.

Secondly, this convention aims to provide participants with diverse educational opportunities to envision a future, building upon past triumphs and then forging an inherently self-paced path towards it. By weaving together these two strategies, ISNA strives to deliver a dynamic event that equips each attendee with the necessary tools, knowledge, and inspiration to become catalysts of positive change both within their respective communities and beyond.

The second part of the convention's theme, “Navigating the Way Forward,” carries significant relevance in the context of prevailing global circumstances. The far-reaching effects of the pandemic, coupled with the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict and other global tensions amid economic recession, have had a profound impact on our lives. As a result, this year's convention

seeks to specifically address the challenges confronted by our community, while simultaneously inspiring and encouraging active participation from attendees. The intention is to equip individuals with the necessary motivation and tools to effectively navigate these obstacles and make meaningful contributions towards overcoming them.

It is crucial to emphasize that, for the past 60 years, ISNA has organized this convention not only to impart knowledge but also to inspire and mobilize action. From the outset, the ISNA board has made a clear distinction in their approach. Instead of referring to it as a conference, typically attended by academics, scholars, and activists exchanging information and ideologies, ISNA designs it as a convention to foster a comfortable niche, grounded in shared values to foster a higher level of awareness, motivation, and commitment to taking immediate action.

For six decades, this gathering has enabled participants not only to feel motivated but also to become dedicated in putting forth necessary actions with sincerity. Attendees will not only be reminded of their voting rights but will also be taught the procedures for selecting ideal candidates, without endorsing any particular individuals or parties. This action-oriented gathering seeks to bring about tangible changes in pressing areas of concern, such as ensuring

the election of independent representatives, combating Islamophobia, and empowering our youth to forge ahead.

These challenges represent just a fraction of the issues that Muslims face in America, and ISNA, driven by its grand vision, aims to address them comprehensively. Its systematic approach to identifying prominent problem domains within America and around the world is a testament to its unwavering commitment. To ensure a current and focused approach to addressing social and political issues, ISNA has established a formal Strategic Planning Committee (SPC).

The CPC has incorporated the analysis of the SPC, which, in collaboration with other like-minded organizations, has conducted an extensive examination to determine ISNA's current position, future goals, and the path to achieving them. The May/June 2023 issue of the Islamic Horizons provided a glimpse into the SPC's comprehensive and methodical approach to the sole quest of serving Muslim Americans. Based on its thorough analysis, the following key areas have emerged as focal points for the main sessions of this convention:

① **Spiritual:** Exploring faith, devotion, and its practical application in daily life to shape an individual as an agent of God (Quran 2:31) for promoting positive change around us.

② **Political:** Familiarizing political activism and civic engagement to thrive as an accountable being of God.

③ **Social Issues:** Discussing family matters, marriage, domestic violence, and fostering a healthy family environment to nurture a growth continuum.

④ **Social Justice:** Addressing poverty, racial and economic justice, and civil rights by imparting wisdom to navigate through the contemporary challenges.

⑤ **Community:** Emphasizing the role of the mosque, grassroots activism, and environmental concerns to facilitate efficient interaction within and beyond the community.

⑥ **Youth:** Recognizing and addressing the challenges faced by the youth to foster inclusivity.

⑦ **Health:** Preparing for future pandemics, and prioritizing mental health to seek professional help in accordance with faith guidelines.

⑧ **Education:** Discussing Muslim institutions, seminaries, professional and career development in the digital age to remain relevant for all audiences, while motivating each person to work towards a cause.

⑨ **Interfaith Collaboration and Harmony:** Promoting cooperation and understanding among different religious communities to establish common good and truths of all religions for a nation that





is founded on the principle of “united we stand.”

In order to create a comprehensive and transformative convention, these critical areas of our time will be delved in such a way that all audiences – academic, political, and lay Muslims – can benefit and go home more committed.

The convention plans to commence with a special introductory session, setting the stage for a comprehensive program hosting a total of 10 main sessions and 20 parallel sessions. These sessions encompass a diverse range of formats, including workshops, seminars, and interactive formats aptly arranged to facilitate knowledge sharing and the exchange of experiences. The lineup of speakers and presenters is set to be exceptional, with distinguished scholars, renowned speakers, and accomplished artists hailing from various corners of the globe converging to share their profound wisdom and insights. From engaging lectures and enlightening workshops to captivating art exhibits and culturally rich performances, the convention promises to cater something interesting for everyone in attendance.

For history enthusiasts and the curious, the History Gallery is an unmissable attraction. Making its debut at the 50th ISNA convention, the Gallery will return with a collection of historical materials, including posters, photos, documents, and artifacts. Showcasing the growth of ISNA from its early years as MSA in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, the Gallery provides an opportunity for older visitors to reminisce about earlier times and for younger visitors to gain insight into the Islamic environment nurtured by their elders. All visitors will

deepen their understanding of the sources of strength from which ISNA draws.

To celebrate its 60th year, ISNA describes hosting a main session where past presidents and leaders who have played pivotal roles in the organization's growth. They will share their hopes and aspirations for ISNA's future, intertwining an assessment of ISNA's past accomplishments with its firm commitment to future growth.

Overall, this year's convention presents an invaluable opportunity for our community to unite and commemorate our shared values, beliefs, and traditions. Attendees can strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood to carry out mutual learning and growth. By connecting with our collective past, we can chart a course for the future, empowering and inspiring each individual on their personal journey of transformation.

Everyone should seize this opportunity. The time has come to witness greatness, to celebrate triumph, and to be a part of a legacy that will resonate for generations to come. Don't let this moment slip away. It's an invitation to immerse in a community of passionate individuals who are committed to making a lasting impact; a community powered by a shared vision of unity, progress, and compassion. None should overlook such an invitation to be a part of something truly extraordinary.

Mark your calendars and secure your place at this grand affair, where we come together to honor the remarkable legacy of ISNA and the countless lives it has touched. Together, let us create a symphony of celebration — a testament to the enduring spirit of ISNA and the remarkable individuals who have paved the way for our

Islamic Horizons Welcomes Assistant Editor



IN APRIL, ISLAMIC HORIZONS WELCOMED Kiran Ansari to join ISNA's flagship publication as the Assistant Editor. She has been contributing to the magazine for close to two decades as a freelance writer. She hopes to add value by recruiting more fresh voices and varied content. Her area of expertise is human interest stories.

“I look forward to working under the guidance of Brother Omer bin Abdullah and increasing the print and digital readership of Islamic Horizons,” Ansari said. “There is so much valuable information in these pages that it has to reach more homes across North America.”

Previously, Ansari served as the Editor of the Chicago Crescent newspaper. For three years she was in charge of the monthly newspaper of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. She has also written about Muslims in America for the Chicago Tribune, Daily Herald, and Chicago Parent among others.

Born in Pakistan and raised in the U.A.E, she has been calling Chicago home since 1999. She lives in the suburbs with her three children. **ib**

shared future. Let us stand united, breaking barriers and forging new paths toward a brighter future. Join us as we make history, united under the banner of ISNA's 60th anniversary. **ib**

Rasheed Rabbi is an IT professional who earned an MA in religious studies from Hartford Seminary and is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry from Boston University. He is also the founder of e-Dawah (www.edawah.net) and secretary of the Association of Muslim Scientists, Engineers & Technology Professionals. He serves as a khateeb and Friday prayer leader at the ADAMS Center and a certified Muslim chaplain at iNova Fairfax, iNovaLoudoun and Virginia's Alexandria and Loudoun Adult Detention Centers.

Summer Camps Nurturing a Sound Heart

Sign Up for Muslim Youth Camps Today!

BY ALAA ABDELDAIEM

THEY'RE BACK!

AFTER GIVING CAMPERS a taste of MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America) over a series of three-day spring break camps, something bigger and better is just around the corner. MYNA is hosting six week-long summer retreats across the nation in July and August.

Whether you live in the Midwest or on the West Coast, by the beach in Florida or near a busy metropolis like New York, summer camps are a wonderful opportunity for Muslim youth to come together. The objective of these camps is to unite under the guidance and with blessings of God. With that in mind, MYNA will be hosting camps in Indiana, California, Texas, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin from July 23 to August 5.

For one week, campers and counselors alike will be given an experience of a lifetime. They'll listen to speakers like Ustadha Aatifa Shareef, Ustadha Khadijah Bari, Br. Habeeb Quadri, Mufti Hussain Kamani, and more, getting access to knowledge that may usually be hard to attain. They'll engage in interactive workshops and deep discussions, learning to view a topic from a perspective they otherwise may not have known.

The 2023 summer camp theme "A Sound Heart" is inspired by this hadith of the Prophet ((*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*)). "There lies within the body a piece of flesh. If it is sound, the whole body is sound;



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SUMMER CAMPS 2023

A SOUND Heart

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North Central WISCONSIN July 30 - Aug 5 Camp Whitcomb Mason	Midwest INDIANA July 30 - Aug 5 Camp Rancho Framasa	South Atlantic GEORGIA July 30 - Aug 5 Wahsega 4-H Center

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and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Verily this piece is the heart." (Al-Bukhari, 52 and Muslim, 1599).

The Prophet Ibrahim prays in the Qur'an, "...Oh God, do not allow me to be put to shame, on the day when all will be brought forth, on the day when nothing will avail anyone from money or children except he who comes to God with a sound heart (that is saleem). (26:87-9)." **WHAT IS A SALEEM (SOUND) HEART?**

WHAT IS A SALEEM (SOUND) HEART?

Al-qalb-al-saleem is what can give you the power to stay grounded as you move through the challenges of life. It is what can keep you in a state of gratitude at all times. It is how can you adopt and maintain a zoomed out perspective that allows for judgements and reflections to be made without emotions clouding your rational thoughts. A

sound heart is free from any blemish, illness, or issue. It recognizes life for what it is: a test for the believer, a place to worship and to practice patience while the promise of happiness awaits in the hereafter.

While many of us focus on how to keep our physical bodies healthy, we pay little attention to what it means to have a healthy, sound heart. This week-long camp will allow campers to explore the foundations of *tazkiyah* (purification of the heart), and the signs, symptoms, and cures of some of the most common and detrimental spiritual diseases.

Youth will also face their fears and learn to love their fellow brother or sister for His sake, jumping off of a zipline and creating lasting memories around a bonfire. They'll learn what it means to have a second family, a second home, chanting and voicing their MYNA spirit by the end of the week.

Most importantly, they'll come together to achieve one goal: change. Improving the world around us begins with improving ourselves, and while the ultimate journey on His path may be a long one, youth can take that first step with MYNA this summer. Why wait? We are not just the future.

We are the present.

Join us to take a deep dive on this essential prophetic practice and cultivate your consciousness and character, spirituality, and morality as Young Muslims in America. [ib](https://www.instagram.com/ib)

Alaa Abdeldaiem is the MYNA Manager in ISNA's Youth Development Department

Educators Convene to Focus on Enriching Students' Lives

300+ attend ISNA Education Forum

BY ISNA EDUCATION FORUM PLANNING COMMITTEE



IN MAY, MORE THAN 300 TEACHERS, administrators, board members, and parents felt inspired at the 24th ISNA Education Forum in Chicago. The engaging sessions provided relevant information and activities for attendees to take back to their schools and communities.

The Forum was blessed with the presence of one of its founders, Dr. Abdalla Idris Ali, a former ISNA president. In his *khutbah*, he shared some of the struggles of the original Islamic Schools and expressed his satisfaction with the progress that Muslims have made in this area. He motivated attendees by reminding them that the work that is done in Islamic Schools may seem difficult, but it should be viewed as an honor to be selected by God to be in His service.

ISLAMIC STUDIES TRACK

This year's Islamic Studies sessions touched upon a wide range of interesting topics. The Monarch Unit Companion Series session

demonstrated a multistep approach to learning about the *Sahaba* (companions). Educators learned how they could act as "knowledge architects," guiding their students on a metamorphic journey where students emerge, transforming their knowledge into action beyond the classroom. Participants learned that they could make *Sahaba* biographies relevant to students today, such as Musab bin Umayr (*radi Allahu 'anh*) could be viewed as an influencer in Makkah. The participants were provided with a free resource from presenter, Leila Osman, that was ready to be incorporated in their classrooms.

The attendees also got hands-on experience with additional resources available to educators thanks to Susan Douglass, Farea Khan, and Nada Wafa. Participants became students, engaging with film clips from Unity Productions Foundation. They completed a cooperative learning activity to acquire knowledge and share that with other members of the audience.

Another timely presentation was "The Need for Health Education from the Islamic Perspective." Presenter Amber Khan explained that now, more than ever, because our culture lacks education in the spiritual dimension, Muslims must acquire the necessary Islamic knowledge to follow in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and be ready to address sensitive topics in an appropriate manner.

In the "Teaching for Better Brains and Healthy Learners" session, Sue Labadi (founder and president of Genius School, Inc.), shared how good habits such as an exercise regimen, a healthy diet, and practicing methods to reduce stress are essential for brain health and learning.

Saffet Catovic emphasized in his presentation, "Teaching About Care for the Natural World, Environment and Climate," that we must teach our children that they have the responsibility to be the caretakers of our Earth. They should strive to find solutions for the problems brought about by climate change.

ARABIC, QURAN, AND CURRICULUM TRACKS

As always, the Arabic & Quran sessions were well-attended and offered teachers and administrators insight into teaching strategies to enhance the programs at their schools and raise their students to even higher levels of mastery.

It was noted by one of the long-time presenters and experts in the field, Dr. Dalia El-Deeb, that the level of proficiency of the teachers has significantly increased over the past 10 years. She attributed it to being a testament of the effectiveness and importance of the sessions offered at the Ed Forum.

Diverse topics were covered in the Curriculum & Instruction track ranging from cultural diversity and teaching with social emotional learning in mind, to brain-based learning. The sessions were engaging and hands-on, and the attendees all left wishing they had more time to increase their knowledge and skills.

LEADERSHIP TRACK

The leadership track began with a full day Pre-Conference on "Strengthening the Principal and Board Partnership" presented by outgoing CISNA Board President Dr. Leila Shatara and incoming president, William White. It covered roles and responsibilities, board recruitment, principal search,



recruitment and evaluation, and ways to build the relationship between the Board and the school leadership to make it most effective and positive. Attendees said they “genuinely benefited from the discussions” and that the sessions were “well-organized and engaging.”

Leadership sessions also included an insightful presentation by Talaat Pasha on “Best Practices for Educators from Prophetic Tradition and Positive Intelligence.” Participants were able to complete a survey that allowed them to better understand their own thinking and their own saboteurs. Pasha infused both Prophetic lessons with research based positive intelligence to provide insight for the attendees to best find ways to strengthen their performance and well-being.

Continuing to provide examples of the Prophetic model in leadership, Magda Elkadi Saleh and Shatara presented a session on Leading with Compassion. It was an interactive session where attendees were able to learn from one another as they shared experiences and provided examples in the life of the Prophet that showed how merciful he was even when faced with the harshest circumstances and individuals.

Dr. Muhammad Khalifa presented a workshop entitled “What’s Missing from Islamic Schools? Culturally Responsive School Leadership” that was electric and introspective. It reminded attendees of how Prophetic tradition was inclusive, diverse, equitable and made the *Sahaba* feel valued. Questions for reflection included, “How do we deal with school members and community members within schools that may feel marginalized? It was a perfect interactive and

engaging workshop that allowed participants to do much needed self-auditing.

Becoming A Reflective Practitioner to Enrich the Lives of Students by Dr. Suad Islam demonstrated the power and impact of effective reflective practices for school leaders looking at *tafakkur* (deep contemplation that impacts behavior) as a daily iterative process. Some of the thought-provoking questions posed included “How do we self-examine?” and “How to measure the impact of the solution? The workshop was engaging, filled with laughter, and tools provided can be transferred in helping participants become better reflective practitioners in their respective schools.

WEEKEND SCHOOLS

WISER (Weekend Islamic Schools Educational Resources) presented “Designing Your Dream Weekend School” with the support of five of its board members. They introduced WISER’s mission “...to raise the quality of Islamic weekend schools and after-school programs that nurture spiritual growth, develop character, and instill God-consciousness.”

The audience also caught a glimpse of some professional development expertise that board members can offer to teachers, administrators, and school board members. Necva Ozgur (founder, WISER), touched everyone’s hearts as she shared her vision for what an ideal school can be. Weekend schools can acquire a complimentary membership and get access to several resources at www.wiser-usa.org. Be sure to check the website each month for new updates, including WISER’s 10 Standards for Islamic weekend schools.

ASK THE EXPERTS & CONCLUDING SESSIONS

Participating in workshops is beneficial, but sometimes more help is needed to implement new ideas. That was one of the reasons for the “Ask the Experts” session. The room was filled with educators seeking guidance for their school issues: “How can we teach the meaning of the Quran when we have only two periods a week for Quranic Studies?” “What do you think of these resources that we are using for our classes?” “How do we deal with implicit and explicit racism that may exist in our schools?”

This session allowed speakers to learn about some of the challenges that their colleagues were facing and it provided an opportunity for speakers and participants to brainstorm to come up with solutions. Even after the official session ended, the conversations continued demonstrating the benefits gained from the collegial experience.

In the concluding session, attendees got a chance to hear from the Forum Planning Committee, and more importantly, they got a chance to give their feedback. Overall, the comments were very positive, and most of the attendees stressed that they would attend again. Raffles added a lot of excitement to the final session. Twenty attendees introduced themselves and their schools as they received their gifts. The diversity was amazing and inspiring.

BANQUET HIGHLIGHTS

The Saturday banquet was truly an enjoyable and memorable event. The keynote speaker was Illinois State Rep. Nabeela Syed (D), who took office in January 2023 as the youngest ever to serve in the state General Assembly. She encouraged the youth to take a greater interest in and become active in their local communities. “To make change, we need to be the change,” Syed said.

Sue Labadi received the ISNA Ed Forum Lifetime Achievement award. She is a licensed health trainer, an experienced consultant, teacher, and Islamic school administrator with degrees in psychology, sociology, and a master’s degree in teaching. She has served on the CISNA and WISER boards and serves on the faculty of CISE and DEFINE360. It was a well-deserved honor, which she accepted surrounded by her family, friends, and colleagues.

The evening also included fundraising conducted by Sh. Abdalla Idris Ali. The banquet concluded with beautiful *nasheed* and poetry from Chicago area students. **ib**



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ISNA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Basharat Saleem, former ISNA president Azhar Azeez, and other ISNA leaders met with President Joe Biden at the Eid celebration event at the White House on May 1.

In his opening remarks, President Biden said, "Welcome to your home. Eid Mubarak." He emphasized the diverse contributions Muslims have made to

our nation as teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, business owners, congresswomen, and congressmen.

Through its office in Washington D.C., ISNA is engaged in interfaith and government relations and continues to build bridges for the Muslim community.

With the White House Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships office, ISNA works with the federal government to serve various needs of our community. ISNA has worked on



(l-r) Former ISNA presidents Imam Maged, Azhar Azeez, executive director Basharat Saleem, Ingrid Mattson and ISNA board member Rizwan Jaka

many initiatives, including a program with the Environmental Protection Agency to address climate change.

President Jimmy Carter addressed the 2014 ISNA convention. President Biden and President Obama have sent video messages in previous conventions. **ib**

Minneapolis Allows Publicly Calling Adhan



THE MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL UNANIMOUSLY voted (12-0) on April 13 to allow unfettered broadcast of the Muslim call to prayer — the first major American city to do so. The change to the city's noise ordinance ensures that the *adhan* can be broadcast from speakers year-round, five times a day. Previously, the city's noise rules prevented some morning and evening calls at certain times of the year because they occurred at night with tighter noise restrictions.

"The Constitution doesn't sleep at night," Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said after the vote. Hussein said the development should serve as a signal to the world that a "nation founded on freedom of religion makes good on its promise."

Minneapolis has a huge population of

Muslim immigrants. It has three Muslim Council members too: Aisha Chughtai, Jeremiah Ellison and Jamal Osman.

Year-round broadcasts were allowed last year but only between 7am and 10pm. Ellison, Chughtai and Osman remarked that previous actions to expand the *adhan* carried the feeling of asking permission — as opposed to practicing a protected right enjoyed by other religions.

January is Muslim Heritage Month in New Jersey



ON APRIL 28, NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR, Philip D. Murphy signed into law the Muslim Heritage Month Resolution which designates January of each year as "Muslim Heritage Month" in the state. It calls upon local government agencies and organizations to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and educational programs that pay homage to the growing Muslim American community.

The signing ceremony was held during the Governor and First Lady's Eid celebration at Drumthwacket, the Governor's residence in Princeton, attended by members of the New Jersey Muslim community.

In a statement, CAIR-NJ executive director Selaedin Maksut, said, "We are happy to take this small step towards pushing back against anti-Muslim bigotry, and we are excited for what's to come. We also want to thank the Governor and his administration for their support of this resolution."

"The history of Islam and the growing Muslim Community in New Jersey is rich in the lessons of how the human spirit struggles against social, political, and economic adversity to successfully establish a model life working to serve God and bring forward a model human society," said Imam Wahy-ud Deen Shareef, Council of Imams in New Jersey.

New Jersey has the highest percentage of Muslim residents in the U.S., at 3.5%, according to 2020 US Religion Census and the Association of Religion Data Archives. The state also leads the way for local representation, with over 40 Muslim elected officials, including the first ever Muslims to the New Jersey State Legislature, Sadaf Jaffer and Shama Haidar.

First Muslim Mayor in Maryland

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBER DR. FAZLUL Kabir was elected mayor of the City of College Park, Md., following a landslide victory in a special election held in May. He is reportedly the first Muslim Mayor of any city in Maryland.



'The Nakba' Rings Loudly in the Halls of Congress

Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) successfully hosted a packed Capitol Hill event on May 11, recognizing 75 years since the "Nakba," the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homeland. The event took place despite Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's attempt to cancel.

"Let the headlines read 'McCarthy tries to erase Palestine but fails,'" said Tlaib.

CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad called upon Congress members to condemn "Speaker McCarthy's reprehensible attempt to silence the voice of the first Palestinian-American U.S. representative and to erase Palestinian history. Such behavior is un-American and perpetuates the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people."

During the event, which CAIR co-sponsored alongside with various Jewish, Palestinian Christian and other human rights groups, Rep. Tlaib announced that she had introduced a House Resolution Recognizing the Ongoing Nakba and Palestinian Refugees' Rights.

The term "Nakba" is an Arabic word meaning "catastrophe," and is used to describe the large-scale ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homes and homeland from 1947 to 1949.


In addition to recognizing the ongoing Nakba and Palestinian refugees' rights, the resolution urges the U.S. to maintain its support for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This organization offers critical social services to a significant portion of the 7 million Palestinian refugees. The resolution also calls for the implementation of the rights of Palestinian refugees, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN General Assembly Resolution.



Earlier this week, CAIR called on community members to urge lawmakers to support Congresswoman Betty McCollum's (D-Minn.) recently reintroduced "Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act."

The event was sponsored by the Institute for Middle East Understanding, Americans for Justice in Palestine Action, Project 48, Democracy for the Arab World Now, U.S. Campaign for Palestinian

Rights, Jewish Voice for Peace Action, American Friends Service Committee, Virginia Coalition for Human Rights, Emgage Action, JVP Action, and co-sponsored by Justice Democrats, American Muslims for Palestine, CAIR, Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Institute for Policy Studies, The Jerusalem Fund, Arab Center Washington DC, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP), Hindus for Human Rights, and the Arab American Institute.

The resolution, cosponsored by Reps. Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.), Cori Bush, Betty McCollum, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), and Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), is endorsed by Jewish Voice for Peace Action, Institute for Middle East Understanding, Americans for Justice in Palestine (AJP Action), Project48, Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR), Emgage Action, American Muslims for Palestine, The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Hindus for Human Rights, and The Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development. 

Kabir grew up in Bangladesh and lived in the U.K. and Canada before moving to College Park 20 years ago. He works for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. He served on the council for 12 years, and has previously worked as an adjunct professor teaching cybersecurity at the University of Maryland.

White House Reinstates Muslim Liaison Position

ON APRIL 14, CIVIL RIGHTS ATTORNEY Mazen Basrawi was appointed Senior Adviser and White House liaison to the Muslim American community. This position had been eliminated during the Trump Administration. He will also continue in his current position of Director of Partnerships and Global Engagement at the National Security Council (NSC).



Basrawi (BA, Univ. of Virginia; Charlottesville Va., JD, University Of California, Berkeley) previously served as a trial

attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. He successfully defended the right of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro in Tennessee to open their mosque in the case of U.S. v. Rutherford County, Tennessee.

After joining the 2008 Obama presidential campaign and inaugural committee, Basrawi was appointed as a special counsel to Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez at the civil rights division.

Basrawi, who is visually impaired, was appointed by Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe to the Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired, where he has served as chairman since June 2020.

Before working in the federal government from 2004 to 2006, Basrawi was an Equal Justice Works Fellow for Disability Rights Advocates.



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Muslim Soccer Players Can Now Break their Fast on Time

MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER finally agreed to a league wide “Drinks Break” policy during Ramadan, that allows players who fast during Ramadan to quickly break their fast along the sidelines during a game stoppage just after sunset.



This is a shift from years past when Muslim players were expected to wait until halftime or after the game to break their fasts. Now, referees can briefly stop play during evening games involving Muslim players. They did so during an April 1 game between the Columbus Crew and Real Salt Lake, which involved two Crew players, Mohamed Farsi and Steven Moreira.

The old approach was challenging, since each half of an MLS game lasts at least 45 minutes. Players who hadn't eaten or had a drink since sunrise would have to remain hungry and thirsty long after the sun went down. In the U.K., both the Premier League and English Football League allow referees to pause games during Ramadan to allow fasting players to eat and drink.

The National Women's Soccer League has also adopted a “Drinks Break” policy for Ramadan, but referees have not yet needed to use it due to a lack of Muslim players. However, elsewhere, Muslim players continue to face pushback when they request religious accommodations during Ramadan. In Ligue 1 in France, for example, fasting players are sometimes benched and referees are told not to allow Ramadan-related breaks in play.

In other sports, Muslim players are generally able to break their fasts without any help from referees. Basketball players, for example, can take advantage of frequent substitutions or later start times for games.

NJ Muslim Inmates Can Keep Hijab On

ON APRIL 17, THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS' (NJDOC) announced its new policy allowing incarcerated people to wear hijab for intake mugshots that are publicly available.



The department's decision came after almost two years of advocacy spearheaded by CAIR-NJ civil rights attorney, Nina Rossi.

The NJDOC said it respects the sincerely

Disney and Netflix Employees Host Iftar



PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMINA AHMAD

On March 30, the Pillars Fund and the Muslim employee resource groups at The Walt Disney Company and Netflix, held their first-ever iftar for Muslim employees and filmmakers at Netflix headquarters. 150 people in the industry gathered to break their fast.

“Pillars is excited to be in community with Muslim creatives and entertainment professionals at the forefront of industry change. It was an honor to break our fasts together during such a sacred time, and we are eager to continue building power with Muslim artists throughout the year,” said Arij Mikati, Managing Director of Culture Change, Pillars Fund

The program kicked off with welcome remarks, a presentation from Pillars on culture change in Hollywood, followed by iftar, prayer, and dinner. Guests traveled from the East Coast and even Canada to attend the inaugural event. *ib*

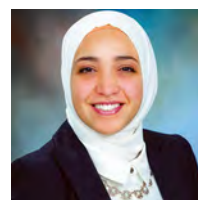
held religious beliefs of the incarcerated population. The department affords incarcerated persons the right to exercise those beliefs so long as they do not impose an undue burden on the safety of staff and/or other inmates or orderly operations of a facility. As such, incarcerated persons may request to have to wear their religious head coverings for those photographs that are posted publicly.

“Muslim women who wear *hijab* (head scarves) or *niqab* (face veils) now have the option to request a ‘Photo Religious Exemption’ form, which would allow them to wear their hijab or *niqab* in any publicly posted photos,” said Selaedin Maksut, CAIR-NJ Executive Director.

In July 2021, CAIR-NJ, filed an OPRA (Open Public Records Act) request asking about the NJDOC's policies regarding intake photos. CAIR continued to follow up with NJDOC and in Sept. 2021, NJDOC agreed to revisit their policy. In Jan. 2023, NJDOC produced the current version of its policy.

First Woman to Chair CAIR-Houston

RAWAN HARIRAH WAS elected as the new board chair and president of the board of directors of CAIR-Houston. She is the first woman to hold this position. Harirah oversees CAIR-Houston's strategic direction and leads the organization in its mission to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower Muslim Americans, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.



She has been involved with CAIR-Houston for several years. She first learned about the organization when she filed a discrimination case against Schlitterbahn Water Park in Galveston, TX for denying her access to all water slides due to her hijab. She later interned for CAIR-Houston before joining the board of directors in 2017 and serving as the secretary before being elected board chair. *ib*

ACHIEVERS



IMAM SAFFET CATOVIC, DIRECTOR OF United Nations Operations for Justice For All (www.justiceforall.org) spoke at a special Ramadan Iftar program at the Association of Bosniaks of Delaware Valley - Mosque in Delran, N.J. The program included a keynote speech by Hafiz Dr. Safvet ef. Halilovic, professor of Quran at Islamic Faculty in Zenica and envoy of Riyasaet and Reis al Ulema (Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina) to the Bosniak diasporic community in the U.S. for Ramadan.

Imam Catovic was presented with the Certificate of Recognition by the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Islamic Community of North American Bosniaks (the official religious organizations of Bosnian Muslims). It was to recognize his efforts and dedication in making Muslim

Americans more vibrant and visible and for his support of the Bosnian Muslims.

Earlier, he served as head of the ISNA Office for Interfaith, Community Alliances and Government Relations.

Al Jazeera Host Wins Prestigious Award

MALIKA BILAL, THE HOST OF "THE TAKE," Al Jazeera Digital's flagship news and current affairs podcast won the Gracie Award for excellence in work produced by, for, and about women.



The Gracie Awards Gala was held on May 23 in Los Angeles, where the AWMF honored the outstanding work of women in TV, radio, and digital media.

In three weekly installments, "The Take" builds on the global reportage of Al Jazeera English journalists, local experts, and people living at the center of some of the world's biggest news stories. "The Take" has extensively covered world politics, racial inequality and much more.

Presented by the Alliance for Women in Media Foundation (AWMF), it was also the second time Bilal fetched the top prize in the Podcast Host — News category. Held across dozens of categories, the competition drew entries and winners from a variety of news and entertainment outlets, including National Public Radio, Washington Post, CBS News, 60 Minutes, 48 Hours, Vice, Wondery and Spotify.

"We're very proud of Malika and The Take podcast team," said Carlos van Meek, Al Jazeera's director of digital innovation and programming.

Muslims Elected to County Positions

ATHER MOHIUDDIN, ASIF QUERESHI, AND Mohammed Rizwan were elected to serve as part of the Fort Bend County Municipal Utility Districts (MUDs).

"Their victories are significant for the American Muslim community and the wider community in Fort Bend County," said William White, CAIR-Houston Director. This demonstrates that diversity in leadership can make a positive impact and serve the best interests of the community as a whole.

"This is a proud moment for the American Muslim community, and we congratulate them on their success. Their leadership will empower fellow American Muslims to take an active part in the political process, serve their communities and contribute to the betterment of society."

Biden Appoints Muslim to Art Committee

PRESIDENT BIDEN APPOINTED SHAHID Ahmed Khan to the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts (PACA). Khan, founder of Tricon-boston Consulting Corporation, a prominent member of the Greater Boston Muslim community area, brings to PACA a rich tapestry of experience spanning over two decades in international affairs. His focus on the Asian and Muslim world is reflected in his work as a community leader, political advisor, and entrepreneur, advocating for American values and principles through sustained dialogue and engagement.



Established in 1958 by President Eisenhower, PACA has played a valuable role in sustaining the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the National Cultural Center. Khan served as a member of the board of trustees of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and has previously served on the advisory board of the Democratic National Committee. He served as the National Finance co-chair for the 2004 Kerry Presidential campaign, and as an advisor on presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, congressional, mayoral, and judicial campaigns for the past 20 years. He played an integral role in mobilizing and involving the South Asian-American community in the Biden for President campaign. He also serves as advisor on Dunya Media Network International.

ON MARCH 30, THREE MUSLIM WOMEN were recognized among the country's top 15 women faith leaders for their incredible work



coupled with extraordinary leadership on behalf of humanity. Arshia Wajid, founder and board director, American Muslim Health Professionals, Dr. Rania Awaad of the Muslim Mental Health & Islamic Psychology Lab at Stanford Medicine and Dr. Farha Abbasi, founder of the Muslim Mental Health Conference were at a ceremony hosted by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary in Washington D.C.

Wajid shared with Secretary Becerra the role AMHP has played in increasing mental health literacy through Mental Health First

Aid training and how it's important to equip our community with tools to better understand what mental health entails and how to support community members and loved ones that are struggling.

NAZNEEN HASHMI WAS ELECTED AS A Trustee for the Village of Streamwood, Ill. a suburb of Chicago. She works in the in-




formation technology department for a major global company. Her passion has always been to serve and give back to her community. She has extensive volunteer experience and has served on boards of various community service organizations such as: Village of Streamwood — Community Relations Commission; YMCA; Domestic Violence shelter; General Assembly Scholarship; WorknetNCC; MAAP (OCA); and Local Woman's Club.

DAVID ABDULLAH MUHAMMAD FROM Overland Park, Kan., was a top winner in the U.S. Kickboxing National Championships, which qualifies him to participate in the Senior World Championships on Nov. 17-26, 2023, in Portugal. Muhammad, 38, is the dean of student services at the Barstow School. He also serves as head instructor and executive director at the Integrity Martial Arts.



His wife, Aisha Sharif is a poet, author and a college instructor. They have two daughters.



ISLAMIC CENTER OF JOHNSON COUNTY, Kansas Girl Scouts leader Saima Imtiaz was honored with the 2022-23 Volunteer of Excellence Award by the Girl Scouts of NE Kansas and NW Missouri. She said she was accepting the award on behalf of her team of volunteers, Girl Scouts, their parents, and the community. 



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MUHSEN Umrah: No One Left Behind

BY YUSUF RASUL



THE FEELING OF EXCITEMENT AS YOU embark on the journey to Makkah. The awestruck gaze as you see the Ka'bah for the very first time. The feeling of serenity and peace wash over you as you pray inside the Prophet's mosque in Madinah.

Performing umrah is a life changing experience for many Muslims around the world. However, there are some who are unable to make this spiritual journey due to their special needs. Most umrah groups do not welcome those with disabilities or the elderly. This is somewhat understandable as umrah is physically exerting, and there are many other factors that can make it difficult. Nevertheless, even though it can be hard, there are still countless Muslims with disabilities who aspire to complete umrah. With no umrah groups being able to properly accommodate them, there was not much they could do.

Until MUHSEN came along.

Founded in 2017 by Imam Omar Suleiman, MUHSEN (which stands for Muslims Understanding and Helping Special

Founded in 2017 by Imam Omar Suleiman, MUHSEN (which stands for Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs) has achieved much in a short period of time. Their Umrah program is dedicated to help those with disabilities complete the journey of a lifetime. They provide many special accommodations to ensure that everyone has an easy and beneficial experience.



Education Needs) has achieved much in a short period of time. Their Umrah program is dedicated to help those with disabilities complete the journey of a lifetime. They provide many special accommodations to ensure that everyone has an easy and beneficial experience.

"There's an individual volunteer assigned to every person with special needs," said Feryaal Tahir, travel and events coordinator at MUHSEN. "The devotion of these amazing volunteers is truly inspiring." Leading up to the umrah, the volunteer and family video call and get to know each other. During the umrah, the volunteer accompanies the family for around eight hours a day, helping them with anything they need. And even after the umrah is complete, they remain in touch. Finding the right volunteers for this specialized umrah trip is no easy task. "Out of the 500+ volunteers we have across the country, only twenty to thirty are selected," Tahir said. The volunteers go through interviews and have many chats with the family beforehand to see if they're the right fit for one other.

"Umrah with MUHSEN is unlike any other because you never know what you have until you've been without," said Dia Suleiman, a volunteer on the 2022 trip. He was inspired to become a part of the umrah group after seeing how much time, love, and care MUHSEN put's in all their efforts. While he was assigned to help Yousuf on the trip, it was way more than just a 1-on-1 interaction. Suleiman would even play with Yousuf's younger siblings and talk to his parents and grandparents as well.



One of his most memorable moments was when he helped bring Yousuf to visit Prophet Muhammad's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) *rawdah* (resting site) in Masjid an Nabawi. The dense crowds were making it hard to get close, but Suleiman kept asking guard after guard if they could make an exception. Thankfully the guards let them get so close that Suleiman said it truly was a once in a lifetime experience.

Apart from a dedicated volunteer assigned to every special needs pilgrim, MUHSEN makes many other arrangements to make sure that the families have a profound experience. They travel with scholars who can answer questions and keep everyone together with motivational talks. They provide them with wheelchair assistance, ushering services, sign language interpretation, and more. For many parents, it's not their own disabilities preventing them from making umrah, but it's due to not being able to leave their special needs child without proper care. Thanks to the Special Needs Child Care program, parents have the amazing opportunity to perform umrah knowing their kids are being cared for by the right people. They can immerse themselves in worship with peace of mind.

The first MUHSEN umrah comprised around sixty people. Since then they have grown consistently with 145 people on their most recent trip. They have already completed four umrah trips and plan on completing two more before the end of 2023. Now many families of those with disabilities gravitate towards MUHSEN umrah because of their great reputation. The level of care and proper accommodation is unmatched anywhere else and it shows just how devoted everyone is in order to help make hundreds of dua' come true.

MUHSEN is continuing to improve their structure so that more families can avail this opportunity. There are currently more than 500 people on their waitlist, and still millions of Muslims with special needs around the world who haven't been able to perform umrah yet. With their unwavering dedication, MUHSEN has proven that if you receive a Divine Invitation, no one can stop you from fulfilling your dream. *ib*

Yusuf Rasul, who is studying marketing at DePaul University in Chicago, has a passion for entrepreneurship, basketball, and getting the perfect sear on a rib-eye steak.

Suhoor Fest: A New Ramadan Tradition

BY AREENA ALI MEMON



RAMADAN DOES NOT HAVE TO JUST be a month of individual worship. It can also be an opportunity for Muslims to strengthen community ties through iftar gatherings and taraweeh prayers. However, for Muslims in the West, the question remains whether they need to do more. Immigrants often miss the festivities and family gatherings they experienced growing up. Muslims born and raised in North America envy the Ramadan vibes they see in countries with a Muslim majority.

In Dearborn, Mich., Hassan Chami, a dedicated father and pharmacist, took it upon himself to revive the festive spirit of Ramadan. His vision became a reality in 2018. As its name suggests, Suhoor Fest is centered around the morning meal prior to starting the fast. The Michigan Suhoor Fest started in a parking lot, and has since grown significantly. This past Ramadan, it took place every weekend. The continued success and growth reflects how popular it is within the community. For Alina Alam, a popular food blogger @foodiesnapper and mother in the Dearborn community, Chami's vision evoked cherished childhood memories from Pakistan.

The Dallas-area Suhoor Fest was a one-night event organized at the Qalam Institute.

The response was overwhelming, with more than 10,000 attendees. Afaf Masood, mother of four, was thrilled to be part of the inaugural Texas Suhoor Fest.

As a mother of teenagers, Masood strongly advocates for highlighting the enjoyable aspects of Islam, particularly for Muslim children growing up in the West. "Muslim children deserve opportunities for halal fun. We need alternatives for holidays like Halloween," she said. Alam also emphasized the significance of such events providing an alcohol-free and music-free environment, addressing a major concern for Muslims in North America.

BONDING OVER FOOD

Such events are also a great opportunity to reflect the diverse cuisines in the Muslim community. Adding to the charm of the Dearborn event, Ali Wazne and his team from Paradise Street Eats presented a delightful fusion of Indian cuisine. Their Paradise loaded fries and butter chicken tacos on fresh chapati were particularly well-received. Wazne expressed their passion for making Indian food more accessible and exciting. Additionally, their fresh tropical coconuts became a popular treat at the Suhoor Fest. While some may question the



focus on food in Muslim events, Masood pointed out that food plays a significant role in fostering connections, particularly among the youth.

Alam and Masood highlighted that Suhoor Fest is a family-oriented event. They were pleased to see grandparents, parents, and children come together and spend quality time bonding with one another and creating special Ramadan memories. This is a significant aspect to consider, especially in a time when many of the elderly yearn for company.

The primary objective behind Suhoor Fest was to add some festivity in Ramadan



for Muslims. However, people who were not Muslim enjoyed the traditional and fusion food options. Organizers wanted the festival to showcase how hospitality in Islam can play a major role in uniting neighbors. "Sharing food is a great way for people of different cultures and beliefs to come together and build bridges of friendship and harmony," Alam said.

Such events can also help support local Muslim businesses. Alam shared that there are several economic benefits of Suhoor Fest too such as start-ups gaining visibility. New small businesses can test the market with their upcoming menus. Wazne echoed her sentiment, stating that their participation aimed to increase awareness rather than drive immediate sales. While Wazne and his partners had prior experience as owners of Paradise Biryani Pointe in Dearborn, the concept of fusion Indian food on a food truck emerged during Suhoor Fest. Their experience as food vendors was very positive and rewarding, providing the motivation needed to take a significant leap forward. Consequently, Wazne and his team recently launched Paradise Street Eats - Food Truck in Detroit. All thanks to the warm reception they received at Suhoor Fest.

SELF ACCOUNTABILITY

Despite the immense popularity of Suhoor Fest, some said they struggled with embracing this trend. It was particularly due to concerns about it detracting from their worship during the sacred nights of Ramadan. Masood raised an essential point about self-accountability, stating that being mindful about managing time effectively

is key. She emphasized that with wise time management, individuals can reap the benefits of Suhoor Fest without allowing it to have a negative impact on their spirituality.

Everything in Islam is based on our intention. People can attend such community events with the intention of making Ramadan even more memorable for the whole family. Halal fun is fine until there is any kind of wastage – whether it be of time, food, or money. Timebox yourself so you do not regret being too tired for extra prayers in the nights of Ramadan. Make sure neighbors who might be asleep at that time are not disturbed, and never litter or trash food. It doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing scenario. Like so many things in Islam, everyone can enjoy such events in moderation. **ib**

Areena Ali Memon is a single mother in Illinois. She juggles various roles including homeschooling, blogging, YouTube, freelance writing, photography, and managing an Islamic bookstore while pursuing a bachelor's degree in education from the Islamic Online University.

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THE LATINO MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN America is as diverse as the general body of believers who share the same soil and prayer spaces. Latin Americans represent twenty-one different countries with a myriad of races, traditions, and cultures. According to statistics from the Pew Research Center in 2017, 8% of Muslims in the U.S. identified as Latin American. This number has continued to grow, mainly because of immigration and conversion.

Most Latin American converts to Islam are women. However, single Latinas are particularly vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. As new Muslims they are often unaware of their rights in Islam regarding marriage and family. The oppression of Latin American women, mainly converts, by Muslim men is a growing problem that needs to be addressed in our communities.

Unfortunately, the over-sexualization of Latinas on film, television, music videos, and

the like has led to Latin American women, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to become seemingly easy targets for men looking for illicit sexual relationships. The media propagates the “spicy Latina” stereotype as a harmless and flattering compliment.



“We are not an exotic item to collect.”
– Jessica

“Just because we reply to a comment or like your post or comment (on social media) does not mean we want you in our DMs.” – Damaris

② **“We come in all colors and nationalities.”**

Countries in Latin America have their own governments, flags, regions, and varying cultures. Indigenous nations living all over Latin America have their own tribal languages. What ties most of them together are shared languages derived from Latin like Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Their dialects are as distinct as their populations. Unfortunately, this is not common knowledge in the Muslim community, and fellow worshippers tend to group Latinos into a single category, like Mexican, Spanish, or Puerto Rican. This oversimplification can be very offensive. The only solution is education.

“Latina is not the same as Mexican.”
– Nahara

Muslim Latin

Are Muslim organizations g

BY WEN

However, it overlooks the damaging consequences of Latinas being fetishized and reduced to exotic objects.

Some Muslims then unfairly assume that Latina Muslim women are seductresses readily available for courtship and even illicit relationships. In their search for a Muslim spouse, they are used, discarded, and dismissed for not fulfilling unrealistic expectations. To fulfill lusts driven by the entertainment industry, some men go to great lengths to corner Latina Muslims with false promises of an Islamic “happily ever after.” They know their families

TO GIVE LATIN AMERICAN MUSLIM women a chance to voice their concerns, a question was posed to them on social media: *What is one thing you want Muslim men to know?*

We received more than a hundred responses in less than two weeks. The feedback came mainly from women, however, within the comments received, Muslim men echoed some of the sick stereotypes and harassment already mentioned. They said Latinas are “spicy,” “crazy,” and “sexy.” They proceeded to gaslight women who were speaking their truth. Below, we highlight the main points that our Latina sisters made and included some of their complaints in their own words. Quotes include first names only to protect respondents from further harassment.

Here is a list of things Latina Muslims want Muslim men to know

① **“No, we do not want to be your secret 2nd, 3rd or 4th wife.”**

Some Muslim men believe they have impunity when it comes to converts. They offer fraudulent marriage contracts, secret polygamous situations, temporary marriages, or other illicit arrangements under the guise of Islamic marriage. They do not guarantee financial support or companionship. However, one thing is clear - Latina sisters are not having it.

From Our S

“Not all Latinas speak Spanish (at all or fluently). We come in all different colors, races, backgrounds, and life experiences.” – Gia

③ **“We do not all look (or act) like J-Lo.”**

Many Muslim men who harass Latina sisters are searching for their “J-Lo” (Jennifer Lopez) lookalike. The famous Puerto Rican star is an international sensation known for her acting, dance moves, singing, and voluptuous curves. Similar Latina sex symbols like Salma Hayek, Eva Mendes, Sofia Vergara, and singer Shakira have created unrealistic expectations of Latina women. When Muslim men realize that Latinas do not always fit the mold of the hypersexualized celebrities on television, they run the other way. Unfortunately, however, the damage may have already been done.

“Not all Latinas look the same. I have seen

**To curtail the abuse toward
and women, mosque leader
opportunities for their cong
close historical ties between**

as Speak Out

geared to support Latinas?

DY DÍAZ

will not accept the Latinas due to cultural differences.

These women do not always have the assistance of Muslim family members or guardians to vet potential marriage partners. Additionally, Islamic centers may not offer adequate support to new converts in their quest for marriage. This leaves them vulnerable to abusive situations.

Women new to Islam are often unfamiliar with Islamic etiquette about intermingling between the sexes. They can be blindsided when approached by non-practicing Muslim men with evil intentions. Since Latino

Muslims are still a minority, Muslim families from other cultures may be apprehensive about letting their sons or daughters pursue them for marriage.

Another challenge is that convert Latina sisters seldom have a Muslim guardian who



Sisters' Lips

(Muslim) brothers looking for a Latina wife that looks like Sofia Vergara or Salma Hayek, but they are one in a million." – María

"We know you are interested in us because of the stereotypes, but we're not your fetish." – Gia

"Just because I'm Latina doesn't mean I know how to dance!" – Isa

④ **"We do not all come from horrible backgrounds."**

A common misconception about Latinos is that they come from poor, uneducated families. Similarly, Muslim men may believe that due to their upbringing, Latina women are hot-tempered, ill-mannered, and not "wife material." Worse yet, they may assume they have had multiple intimate partners or that they converted because of a Muslim boyfriend. These false narratives fuel predators looking for easy targets and drive away serious potential suitors.

Latin American Muslim men
s must provide educational
regations to learn about the
en Islam and Latin America.

can screen suitors effectively and conduct background checks. What transpires is that Muslim men can bypass the system of checks and balances established by the Quran and Sunnah regarding the legal aspects of Islamic marriage. A new Muslim who may not know she is entitled to a dowry, financial and emotional support may find herself in an abusive relationship. She may experience neglect, exploitation, domestic violence, and other harm.

To curtail the abuse toward Latin American Muslim men and women, mosque leaders must provide educational opportunities for their congregations to learn about the close historical ties between Islam and Latin America. Islamic centers should provide easily accessible authentic education about marital rights, roles, and responsibilities. If some community leaders help new Muslim sisters find, vet, and interview a potential spouse, many of these problems can be reduced. **ib**

Islam. We also know how to study the same way you have." – Cristina

"We are just as great as any good sister out there! In the end, we all want the same things." – Juana

⑥ **The Islamic rules of marriage apply to us too.**

Muslim men should show the same regard for Latina Muslims as they would for a potential spouse of their background. At minimum, they must meet their families, ask for their hand, talk to their *walis* (guardian of rights), and pay them a fair dowry. Latina Muslims have fathers, brothers, and uncles that love and protect them and who deserve respect. An intercultural marriage with a Latina must be conducted the same as any other legal Islamic marriage, according to the Qur'an and Sunnah. If a Muslim man marries a Latina, he owes her the same kind of respect and treatment as recommended by the Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*).

"We are very close with our family." – Khadijah

"We don't belong in the kitchen 24/7." – Esmii

"We are not fast. We know our rights." – Lessie

⑦ **We deserve to learn about Islam the correct way.**

Latina Muslims should be encouraged to

"There are so many different types of women in Latin America. It is not true that we are crazy and that we are always looking for a fight. I think that is a very common stereotype." – Alejandra

"Some sisters convert to Islamic without being married to a Muslim man. Their decision to convert was not influenced by a Muslim husband." – Francoise

⑤ **We deserve respect**

Predators lurk on social media, matrimonial apps, or other chatting platforms and prey on new Muslim women who are vulnerable and lonely. Converts in Latin America and the U.S. are often contacted by so-called "habibis" from foreign countries who lie about their marital status. They lure women into false marriages or marriages of convenience for sex or immigration papers. To remedy this problem, our community centers must offer adequate education for our new sisters and stern warnings for men.

"We don't need you to private message us (on social media) and save us by teaching us

seek Islamic knowledge. Men who seek Latina converts often want to keep them as ignorant as possible to easily manipulate them. A Muslim woman who knows her worth and her rights would not fall for any foolishness easily. She will know that a man who is interested in marriage will take appropriate steps like asking for her guardian's contact information. Creating safe, judgment-free spaces for our new converts to learn is vital to protecting their dignity and limiting private interactions even with male religious leaders within the Islamic community centers.

"When I'm among my Muslim brothers and sisters I don't want to be singled out as a Latina sister. I just want to be seen as a Muslimah." – Shirley

"Be patient and understanding with those who have experienced some kind of trauma in our lives." – Michelle

Our beloved Prophet taught the best lessons about how women should be treated. Once, a young man approached him and asked if he could give him permission to commit adultery. The people began rebuking him, but the Prophet asked him to come close and calmly asked him, "Would you like that for your mother?" The man said no. The Prophet then said, "Neither would people like it for their mothers. Would you like that for your daughter?" The man said no. The Prophet said, "Neither would people like it for their daughters. Would you like that for your sister?" The man said no. The Prophet said, "Neither would people like it for their sisters. Would you like that for your aunts?" The man said no. The Prophet said, "Neither would people like it for their aunts." He concluded by saying, "Then hate what Allah has hated, and love for your brother what you love for yourself" (Musnad Ahmad, 21708).

New Muslimahs, Latina or non-Latina, deserve the same respect owed to mothers, sisters, daughters, and aunts. The Muslim community cannot boast about the rights of all women in Islam while ignoring some of the most vulnerable. One of the final lessons our Prophet taught his followers in his last sermon was to treat women kindly (Tirmidhi). He did not distinguish between black, white, Arab, non-Arab, born Muslim, or converts. In fact, most Muslims during that time were converts. Muslims in North America and beyond should heed these teachings and fear Allah, who will call the believers to account for everything they do. **ib**

Wendy Díaz is a Puerto Rican Muslim writer, award-winning poet, translator and mother of six. She is the co-founder of *Hablamos Islam*, Inc. (<https://hablamosislam.org>), a non-profit organization that produces Spanish-language educational resources about Islam. She is the Spanish content coordinator for the Islamic Circle of North America's *WhyIslam* Project and has also written, illustrated and published a dozen children's books.

Police Officer in a Hijab

Breaking ice with warm conversations

BY SANAA ASIF

UZMAA IFTEKHAR'S FIRST INTERACTION with the police was in 2010, when she was pulled over in Los Angeles. She was amazed by the officer's professional demeanor throughout the entire situation and in the way he treated her. "He was kind, disciplined, and cared for my safety," Iftekhar recalls. Little did he know that this interaction would inspire Iftekhar to pursue a career in law enforcement.

THE JOURNEY

Iftekhar decided to learn more about this profession and understand its values and goals. She started volunteering at the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and would go on ridealongs with officers. This provided her with an opportunity to ask questions about the department and the community while observing patrol duties.

"The more exposure I got on patrol, the more I wanted to be a police officer. Being an immigrant, I loved the fact that there are laws in place to protect us," Iftekhar said. "However, at the same time, I used to get questions about my faith and I realized that some people have no idea! This is why I decided to pursue the profession - not only to be a good community officer, but also to educate others about my faith."

After volunteering at the Sheriff's Department, Iftekhar decided to complete an associate's degree in criminal justice. She then took a 7-year hiatus to have her two children. In 2019, she returned to school to complete her bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and completed her education by 2021.

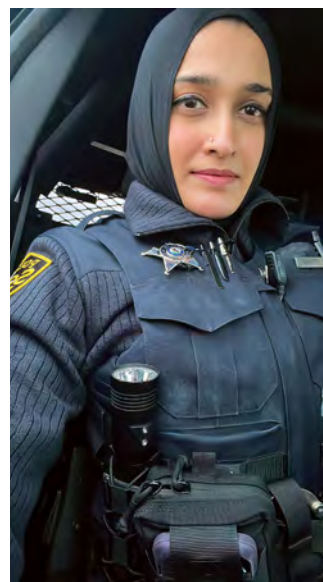
Throughout her journey towards becoming a police officer, Iftekhar's family was incredibly supportive. Her husband had always known about her passion for law enforcement and encouraged her to keep going. Her parents, knowing how committed she was, moved with her to Chicago when she was accepted into the academy. "Without family support in the crucial academy days, I would not be where I am today" she added.

VISIBLY MUSLIM POLICE OFFICER

Iftekhar feels that Islam has given her more strength and power. "There have been times when people are stressed, but as soon as I walk in, my hijab becomes a distraction. They begin asking me questions - and I don't mind at all. I'm asked if I feel hot in the head scarf, if it's a cultural or religious thing, and if I have it in different colors," she said. She uses this opportunity to spread awareness about her faith. She is happy to share what she knows about women empowerment in Islam, and the many rights Islam gives to women.

"Hijab has always been my identity. For all the times I've been harassed, I always came back stronger," Iftekhar says. "Hijab led me to this journey because if people did not ask me about Islam, I wouldn't have gathered the courage to be in this profession and inform people about my faith."

The biggest challenge for Iftekhar was adjusting to her department which



SALAH IN CYBERSPACE

أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله ، نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم ، وعلى آله وأصحابه أجمعين.

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أما بعد.

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A'outhu billahi minash shaitaanir rrajeem

Bismillahir rahmanir raheem

Al hamdu lillah, nahmaduhu wa nusalli 'ala rasoolihil kareem, wa 'ala aalihi wa as-haabihij ajma'a'een.

As salaatu was salaamu alaika ya rasoolullah, wa sallim ala'ka ya habeeballah.

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I am a 77-year-old, retired cardiologist who has done some khatib and imam work in the past. during the pandemic, I developed "Worship in Cyberspace."

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The inaugural salah is planned for Sept 11, 2023.

The plan is for those people who cannot or are unable go to the masjid for worship for them cyberspace is available

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Step-by-step instructions:

- ① Before 6:36 AM, make sure you have wudhu and have done 2 raka'a sunna
- ② At 6:36 enter cyberspace by dialing: 425-436-6374
- ③ An announcer will ask you for an access code.
- ④ Enter access code: 512007
- ⑤ The announcer will ask you if you are the host. You don't have to do anything. Just stay on the line.
- ⑥ In a couple of minutes, the host will enter cyberspace and start the proceedings.
- ⑦ The proceedings start with Iqama, then the salah proceeds with takbir, qira'a, ruku, sujood X 2. and the completion of 2nd raka'ah. ending with tasleem. Just as if you were following the imam in the masjid but you were in the basement and the imam was not visible to you. It is the similar in cyberspace. The imam is not visible. You just follow the verbal commands. Worship is exactly the same as before, with the same postures, the same tasbeeh, etc. It is over in 10 mins.

At the end of fajr, the time for zuhr will be announced and at the end of zuhr the time for 'asr and so on so hopefully all 5 times are covered.

This program is only for those who cannot go to the masjid for worship. If you can go to the masjid to pray, you must. Otherwise, cyberspace is available

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was mostly male dominated. A lot of her co-workers were hesitant to talk to her because she was Muslim, female, and hijabi. However she insisted they reach out to her with any questions. She made herself approachable and opened doors to friendly communication. By breaking the ice, she feels her colleagues respect her faith and are often curious about different topics about Islam.

Iftekhar also feels that it's important for people to remember not to judge the entire law enforcement community by the bad acts of some. This is a sentiment Muslims can relate to as well. "The majority of the work we do revolves around community based policing which requires ethics and moral values," she said. "If one person strays, it hurts the rest of the community as well. It does put a lot of stress on us when there is an incident involving a police officer versus a citizen and it's all over the news."

Throughout her journey towards becoming a police officer, Iftekhar's family was incredibly supportive. Her husband had always known about her passion for law enforcement and encouraged her to keep going. Her parents, knowing how committed she was, moved with her to Chicago when she was accepted into the academy.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Iftekhar hopes to influence many young Muslims to consider a career in law enforcement. Yes, it requires passion. It also requires mental, physical, and emotional strength because of the incidents encountered on a daily basis. However, Iftekhar chooses to look at it differently. She feels being a police officer can also bring a sense of peace. With every drunk driver taken off the road, and with every order of protection for a victim of abuse, the community can become a better place.

"That one thank you note from a child reunited with his parents or a hug from a domestic violence survivor gives you the strength to be back on the street and keep the community safe - every single day." 

Sanaa Asif, a sophomore at Hinsdale Central High School, is an avid reader and loves to write and learn about other people's stories.

Cross Border Support for the Growing Latino Muslim Community

Islamic presence south of the border is much larger than many may assume.

BY LISA KAHLER



HAVE YOU BEEN TO THE MOSQUE recently and met a new Muslim? Chances are that he or she is Latino. The largest growing segment of U.S. Muslims today are Latinos. According to the Pew Research Center, the U.S. Muslim population grew from 2.5 million in 2007, to 3.5 million in 2017. The percentage of the U.S. Muslim population identifying as Latino grew from 1% in 2009 to 7% in 2018. Around 250,000 individuals consider themselves Latino Muslims.

While many Latinos are new to Islam, Islam is not new to Central and South America. Approximately 1.7 million Muslims live south of the border. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Muslims fleeing persecution in Spain traveled to, and settled in, the Americas. Later in the 18th century, enslaved Africans, primarily from Western Africa, were brought to lands controlled by the Portuguese and Spanish crowns.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, individuals from the Middle East left the political turmoil of the declining Ottoman empire for better opportunities in the Americas. Around the same time, indentured servants from the Indian

subcontinent were brought to areas in the Caribbean and Central America that were under British colonial rule. Migration in the 21st century from Muslim-majority countries fostered continued growth in the Muslim communities of Central and South America. Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago are estimated to have the highest percentages of Muslims at 15%, 6.5%, and 6% respectively, according to a 2010 Pew Research Center estimate.

ISLAMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Latino Muslims living in the U.S., Central or South America face many hurdles such as economics, culture, family ties, language, and politics. Institutions based in Southern

California are working in a variety of ways to support Latino Muslims. The Latina Muslim Foundation (latinamuslimfoundation.org) works to provide immediate support for Muslims, international refugees, and other underserved locals, primarily in Tijuana, Mexico. The Spanish Islamic Reliance of America (SIRA; <https://www.facebook.com/our.sira>) provides educational resources in Spanish for those interested in, or new to Islam.

With a shelter, empowerment center, food pantry, and transportation services, located just a few miles from the San Ysidro border in Tijuana, the Latina Muslim Foundation is focused on the immediate needs of the Muslim community in Mexico. During Ramadan 2023, daily iftars were served in multiple locations, along with food baskets. Many Muslim families received Eid baskets too. For refugees waiting on the border for asylum papers to process, as well as local Latino Muslims, the Latina Muslim Foundation's Muslim Refugee Center & Transitional Center, helps provide a haven. The facility includes a *musalla* (prayer space), temporary shelter, and food pantry. While Muslim refugees are waiting for their paperwork to be processed, they can also start building skills and learning about options available in the U.S. Once refugees receive their completed asylum paperwork, complimentary transportation is provided to the next stage in the journey.

"SIRA is a nonprofit organization promoting how to embrace, inspire, and educate new Muslims and the Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. and Latin America,"

Latino Muslims living in the U.S., Central or South America face many hurdles such as economics, culture, family ties, language, and politics. Institutions based in Southern California are working in a variety of ways to support Latino Muslims.



said Rossana Mian, SIRA Secretary. For Spanish-speaking individuals in Southern California, SIRA collaborates with local Islamic institutions to provide mentors, networking, translation, and Spanish language classes on Islam.

President Somaya Elgohary works for a virtual online Islamic educational institute, translating authentic Islamic texts accurately into Spanish. Coordinating with local mosques, such as the Islamic Center of Orange County, volunteers serve as mentors for new Muslims. Mentors provide a safe space to vent, ask questions, and learn from the struggles that others may have experienced. During Ramadan 2023, Mian and her team of volunteers organized a Spanish Language *qiyam* at the Islamic Center of Garden Grove. An entire evening of *dua*, lectures, and prayers, was held in Spanish, to “Embrace, Inspire, and Educate.” At the annual MAS Convention held over Thanksgiving each year at the Ontario Convention Center, a parallel program is held for Spanish-speaking Muslims.




TRIPS, TIPS, AND TACOS

In Fall 2022, a Spanish-speaking contingent of Muslimahs left from SoCal for Umrah. The first Umrah for these attendees was generously sponsored, recorded and published as a documentary, in coordination with SIRA. A moving spiritual journey, the project was designed with the intention to spread awareness and understanding of Latino Muslims in the Americas. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuWqoSMWk5c>).

If you happen to be in Southern California during Ramadan, don't be surprised to hear *Feliz Ramadan!* and *Feliz Eid!* greetings around the ubiquitous Halal Taco Truck at many events. Try to make an effort and include Latino Muslims in your events. Next time you are at the mosque or a Muslim party, look around, and perhaps add *Hola* or *Como estas?* after your greetings of Salam. Chances are there might be some Latino Muslims in the gathering. Don't assume that they are a brand-new Muslim and know nothing about Islam. Many Latino Muslims, such as

the board members of SIRA and the Latina Muslim Foundation, have been Muslim for decades or are second or third generation, American-born, Latino Muslims.

Diversity is woven into the tapestry of Islam. It is up to Muslims to truly include brothers and sisters from different backgrounds in mosque boards, planning committees, social events, and even in their families. 

Lisa Kahler is an educational consultant with more than 25 years experience working in Islamic schools in Southern California.

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The Hafsa Quran Society: Being the Change

BY SHABNAM MAHMOOD



THE PANDEMIC DRAMATICALLY shifted how we approached and navigated our work, education, social, and religious lives. During the lockdown, a group of black Muslim women took to social media to further explore their journey into the Quran.

Majidah Owuo-Hagood, Zahira Abdul Rahim, and Hafidha Dr. Amatullah Saafir started an informal group on WhatsApp and Zoom to find a way to continue connecting over the Quran. Most of these women shared a Senegalese background. Some were teachers; some were students who began

their journey in the U.S., carried it over to Senegal, where they studied further, and brought back a newfound knowledge and ambition to explore the Quran. However, meetings were sporadic as daily life dictated. Majidah eventually moved overseas for a year and couldn't commit fully, and the *Becoming Women of Quran* group stagnated. However, friends continued to ask Majidah for references to any Quran study group.

"At the time, we only had this group," said Majida. The spark was lit. When she returned to the U.S., the demand was significant enough for friends to consider

something more official. So in September 2020, the group relaunched as the Hafsa Quran Society in Memphis, Tenn. offering *Tahfiz* (memorization) and *Tilawa* (recitation) packages to black Muslim women taught by black Muslim women.

CHALLENGES FACED BY BLACK MUSLIM WOMEN

The answer was humbling when asked why not go the traditional route of seeking knowledge. "Classes weren't really offered at the masjid," said Majidah. Classes that were offered were led by men for men. Other challenges faced by women like Majidah and her friends were being mothers and how to pursue classes consistently with children. Other women felt they did not possess the ability to learn because they did not have the foundation most had from their childhood. Some were born Muslim while others were converts.

These are challenges faced by most women seeking Islamic knowledge. So what sets apart the women of the Hafsa Quran Society? Seeing a Black Muslim woman, Majidah was asked to recite Surah Al-Fatiha as a litmus test to gauge her knowledge by Arabic and Urdu-speaking men. In contrast, women of other ethnicities weren't subjected to the same. "The atmosphere wasn't as encouraging." Accessibility to female teachers wasn't readily available. Co-founder and student Zahira Abdul Rahim said there weren't opportunities to teach classes even if there were female teachers. As a result, black Muslim women seeking to learn the Quran were at an impasse.

Their website clearly states that The Hafsa Quran Society is led by all Black Muslim women Quran teachers for Black Muslim women. We have created an online and in-person space to support Black Muslim Women on their Quranic recitation journey to sustain and develop more Black Muslim women to recite and teach the Quran." The Hafsa Quran Society provides a safe space for black Muslim women who feel marginalized when seeking knowledge of the Quran.

The criteria for taking the one-on-one classes from the Hafsa Quran Society is for students to be of African descent and indigenous women. But shouldn't Quran knowledge be open to all?

“We have limited resources in terms of teachers and open spots for students,” said Zahira Abdul Rahim. “We do get a lot of inquiries from women, and when we explain that we want to keep these spaces open for black women, they understand. We refer them to other organizations such as Rabata.” Their group classes, such as the Quran tutoring and monthly Hifz halaqa, are open to all women.

Since relaunching in September, the group held its first retreat in Champaign, Ill., in March. This event introduced the

and learn. “Our aim is to have at least two retreats a year,” Majidah said.


One of the benefits to the students of the Hafsa Quran Society is having a mental health professional as one of the teachers. She meets with students individually and in groups helping to navigate the challenges and blocks students may have while learning. This service has proven successful because students often do not realize what prevents them from learning and understanding Islam, let alone the Quran.

Along with mental and emotional sup-

Society. In addition, there is a teacher who specializes in the Warsh method, given the Senegalese background of most students. The Hafs method levels the playing field when it comes to pronunciation. Still, there is a commonality of understanding between students and teachers of the challenges black Muslim face when learning the linguistic aspect of the Quran.

The Hafsa Quran Society classes are designed to enhance the students’ lives rather than impede a difficult schedule. For instance, study halls are scheduled for after Fajr and Isha. In addition, Tafseer classes are held on Saturdays and Sundays, and recitations are on Sundays. The five-year *Tahfiz* and *Tilawa* pathways are demanding, but students are always encouraged to succeed.

As any student of the Quran can attest, the waning and waxing of *imaan* (faith) can prove difficult. “We have to keep programs going,” says Abdul Rahim. “Learning the *Tafseer*, the meaning of the Quran, and understanding it before memorizing the Quran. We need *tadabbur* (reflection) to remember why we embarked on this journey in the first place.”

The organization hopes its first cohort of students graduate and return as teachers carrying on the tradition of “being that change.” 

Shabnam Mahmood is a freelance writer and educational consultant in Chicago.

Seeing a Black Muslim woman, Majidah was asked to recite Surah Al-Fatiha as a litmus test to gauge her knowledge by Arabic and Urdu-speaking men.

organization to the community. The three-day retreat was filled with Quran reading, guest speakers, memorization of the Quran, and the commencement ceremony of ladies embarking upon learning the Quran. The response has been tremendous. The goal of the Hafsa Quran Society is to eventually open a brick-and-mortar location where women would be able to meet in person

port, the Hafsa Quran Society teachers help students linguistically. “African-American students speak with a unique cadence,” says Majidah. To wrap an English accent around Arabic words can prove difficult for American-born English speakers. However, it is not impossible. Of the seven canonical methods of reciting the Quran, Qiraat, the Hafs method is taught by the Hafsa Quran

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APPLY TODAY!

Nonprofit Fundraising Beyond Ramadan

BY TAYYABA SYED

ACCORDING TO THE 2021 MUSLIM American Giving Study by the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, it has become an American Muslim tradition to give more during Ramadan. This is when acts of goodness like charity are emphasized, and compassion toward people in need shines as the strongest motivation.

Muslims believe they get rewarded manifold for their donations in Ramadan. Many Muslims also pay their annual zakat during Ramadan.

Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: Allah's Messenger, (*salla Allahu alaihi wa sallam*) was the most generous of all the people, and he used to reach the peak in generosity in the month of Ramadan when Gabriel met him. Gabriel used to meet him every night of Ramadan to teach him the Qur'an. Allah's Messenger (*salla Allahu alaihi wa sallam*) was the most generous person, even more generous than the strong uncontrollable wind (in readiness and haste to do charitable deeds). (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 6)

So how does that affect the sustainability of Muslim nonprofits outside of Islam's holiest month?

A TRANSACTIONAL TO INTERACTIONAL APPROACH

Houston resident Afshan Malik is the Director of Development for Rabata (www.rabata.org), a global non-profit organization dedicated to Muslim women and children's education, spirituality, and community. She holds a Masters in Nonprofit Management and is a certified fundraising manager through the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Although she leads a successful Ramadan campaign for Rabata that has been exceeding its goal for the last five years, Malik shares the importance of having a diverse stream of revenue throughout the year.

"As an organization, we use best practice methods, always paying attention to what's happening in the fundraising world for nonprofits," Malik said. "Fundraising as a practice in a Muslim environment is spiritually connected, and as nonprofit professionals, we must really respect individuals' contributions, whether it's a dollar or a thousand dollars."



Rabata has many arms such as its academic institute, publishing press, virtual mosque, and a bookstore and cultural center at its headquarters in Arden Hills, Minn. Throughout the year, they receive donations through many avenues like monthly donors, project-focused fundraising campaigns, educational workshops, and grants.

"It's risky to be dependent on just one source of revenue, and we don't have a culture yet of just limiting our fundraising to annual galas or events," Malik says. "We have reached over 9,000 students in over 60 countries since our inception in 2012, and we focus on teaching community building and being a resource for positive cultural change through faith."

Dr. Shariq Siddiqui from Plainfield, Indiana, is an Assistant Professor of Philanthropic Studies and Director of the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. He states that those organizations that create year-round fundraising practice need a strategy of stewardship, cultivation, engagement, and solicitation.

"This is what we teach in our fundraising school," notes Dr. Siddiqui, who teaches and trains in the science of fundraising and how to do it professionally and systematically. "Muslim nonprofits largely raise funds in Ramadan, Dhul-Hijjah, and at the end of year. If you think about the data, Muslim donors give roughly 54% to Muslim-led nonprofits. The question is then where is the remaining 46% going? When we talk to donors, we learn that it comes down to

a different approach to fundraising. It needs to move from event-based, digital-based and transactional to interactional - building relationships and shared values and making people part of your [cause's] journey and growth. This requires multiple conversations, multiple engagements, and developing connections versus just 'selling.' Rabata is relatively underknown but is setting a great example of putting this into action and curating it to its community members."

For insight on fundraising strategies, go to www.zfinstitute.com. MPI has now partnered with Zakat Foundation to offer subsidized rates for all those interested in this IU professional training course.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

In 2011, Sommieh Stephanie Flower was visiting her husband in Chatha Bakhtawar, a suburb of Islamabad, Pakistan, when she began volunteering to teach English at local schools. On her walks there, she would notice that many children were not in school. Instead, they were doing some type of work like picking up trash, cutting hay for animals or carrying big bundles of sticks on their heads.

"They were dusty, dirty, and poorly-dressed - but very friendly," recalls Flower. "Since there were very few foreigners in town, they started following me around. I would buy them chips and candy and give them whatever small change I had in my pockets." One day, these kids followed Flower home and discovered a pile of empty water bottles laying around. They immediately

began filling their empty rice sacks with the bottles, hoping to make a day's earning for recyclables. They were from migrant and refugee families, and each individual family member was expected to earn his/her own daily bread - even the little children. Soon word spread, and more children started coming to Flower's home everyday in hopes of earning and playing.

"There were about 20 to 25 kids coming over each day," shares Flower, who holds a

our school on a campus with utilities, operational costs, and salary for a staff of 25. We have a student body of 400+ boys and girls from preschool to grade 10. We also have our mother-child center and teachers' institute as well. We initially began raising funds through annual fundraising dinners in Michigan during Ramadan, but we have to get creative and reach more people as costs keep going up drastically."

Supporting children's education brings


year. During the pandemic, our ground teams were still able to provide food relief and schooling. That's because our volunteers become our biggest advocates. When you witness people's hardships, it's heart-breaking but therapeutic too. One has to see it to believe it and be moved. It's not tourism but real work that's truly rewarding."

IAC's Chief Operating Officer Abby Mohammed has traveled to Turkiye from her hometown of Addison, Ill., to serve Syrian refugees. After her first trip, she was 'hooked' to continue doing this work.

"You become an ambassador for these helpless individuals," said Mohammed. "We have 10,000 families in our database that need aid. This Ramadan, we had a tent set up in one of our camps for fresh *suhoor* and *iftar* for earthquake victims. It's still continuing to provide fresh, hot meals today. Although most of our funds are raised in Ramadan, we have to find more ways to support these needs."

Volunteer in-person (VIP) trips are once every quarter, and each volunteer is expected to fundraise a minimum of \$5,000 for IAC before going as well as cover his/her own airfare. Once there, VIP's help distribute food boxes in Turkiye and Syria of nonperishable items such as pasta, oil, rice, flour, candy for the kids etc. People follow their journeys and get inspired by their real-life experience, bringing in more support.

In addition to recruiting hands-on volunteers, IAC has had to find creative ways to raise funds like upping their marketing game. They are making personal connections and reaching out to local mosques and individual communities across the U.S.. They are also collaborating with social media influencers to bring awareness of their work to broader audiences.

"We're trying to change our strategy and approach to fundraising and get IAC on the map. We want to be transparent, to grow and be known," Mohammad says. "It's a new age, and there's lots of new ways to raise money for a good cause. We're past just email marketing. There's so much more potential to bring a fresh angle, and we want to especially get more youth involved as active volunteers; they are the ones who must carry this work forward." 

Tayyaba Syed is a multiple award-winning author, journalist, and Islamic studies teacher. She conducts literary and faith-based presentations for all ages and is an elected member of her local school district's board of education in Illinois, where she lives with her husband and three children. Learn more at www.tayyabasyed.com.

Fundraising for Muslim nonprofits needs to move from transactional to interactional. We need to build relationships and shared values and make people part of our [cause's] journey and growth. This requires multiple conversations, multiple engagements. and developing connections versus just 'selling.'

Masters in Curriculum and Administration and has over 30 years of experience as a teacher and administrator in the U.S. "They would play in my courtyard, and I would give them coloring books, jump ropes, balls, and join them for imaginary tea parties with their self-made clay tea sets from the soil. When I was about to return to the U.S, I had a dream that there were more than 100 kids playing in the courtyard reading books. I woke up and told my husband that I should start a school for these kids, and he made *du'a* right there and then."

When Flower returned to Michigan that Thanksgiving, she told friends about her intention and began fundraising to make her dream come true. As a beloved former educator in her community, she was a trusted figure and quickly raised \$20,000 seed money to launch her vision. Meanwhile, back in Pakistan, Flower's husband bought a white board and desks and set up a classroom in their home for Sitara School (www.sitaratrust.com). They hired a teacher and even offered an informal daycare for younger baby siblings of girls who could only attend if they brought them with them.

"We quickly went from our single classroom in our home to renting a facility. However, every year costs increase" Flower said. "Now it costs us about \$70,000 to run

hope for the future, and for Muslims, we believe it is an investment for our *akhirah* (afterlife) as well. To reach more potential donors, Sitara School has transitioned to crowdfunding and hopes to raise money to own its own school one day.

"I think it's very important for any non-profit to have two types of funds: one for daily expenses and operations, and another for investments for long-term planning," said Flower.

MAKING IT AN EXPERIENCE

Dr. Tarek Shahbandar of Burr Ridge, Ill., began as a volunteer for a relief organization for the victims of the Syrian civil war. It was a life-changing experience for him, and he now serves as the board president for the U.S. branch of the International Aid Charity (www.iacharity.org), which provides emergency and ongoing aid relief, education, orphan sponsorship, and social support services to marginalized peoples throughout the world.

"What gets you truly involved is doing the work on the ground and changing your heart through service," said Dr. Shahbandar. "As a new organization, it was tough the first year. We started with our food drive and school for refugees in Turkiye and Jordan and just continued that work for the next

Single Parents Need Support Not Stigma

How the Muslim Community Can Step Up

BY KIRAN ANSARI



ASMAA HUSSEIN WAS JUST 27 WHEN she became a single mother. Her husband, Amr, was killed in Egypt while peacefully protesting the injustices in the aftermath of the military coup. Her daughter was not even one at that time. Hanan Ahmad* was 45 when she finally had the courage to leave an unhealthy marriage. Her children were teenagers. Imam Pavlíček's boys were just 8 and 10 when he became a single father. The demographics may make these individuals sound very different. However, they have a lot in common.

These brothers and sisters in the Muslim community feel stigmatized as single parents. While the acceptance may be improving slightly, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.

"There is 100% a stigma - and it's not subtle," Hussein said. "It was mere weeks after my husband was killed that I was being asked when I will remarry! I was still in my *iddah* (mourning period)." Instead of feeling sorry for herself, she poured out her heart into a bestselling book, "A Temporary Gift: Reflections on Love, Loss, and Healing." What started off as her journal has become a handbook for thousands of readers.

Despite being able to use her gift of words to help others, single mom life still has its

challenges. "Not having a second parent to share the spiritual and emotional load of parenting has been the hardest part," Hussein said. "It can be incredibly overwhelming even if the physical tasks are not so many."

Single fathers don't have it any easier. Hasan Syed's daughter was only four months old when he became a single dad. He found it particularly difficult to juggle work and parenting. Luckily his mother was able to help. Imam Christopher AbdulKareem Pavlíček of Ojala Foundation in Chicago agrees.

"I truly don't know how I would have been able to take care of everything without the help of my mother, sister and my son's *abuelo* (grandfather) helping out," Pavlíček said.

TYPES OF SINGLE PARENTS

One might think there are just two types of single parents - widowed or divorced. That is not true. The stigmas and assumptions also vary between single parent categories.

"People are more sympathetic towards widows because it's not considered 'their fault,'" Hussein said. "In contrast, I have seen the unhealthy levels of blame placed on divorcees."

"We tend to be selective about what we attribute to Allah as His decree," said Fahad Khan, a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and

Deputy Director of Khalil Center, the largest provider of Muslim mental health in North America. "We may consider certain aspects like death as part of His divine plan while blaming ourselves for others like divorce."

"Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector.' And upon Allah let the believers rely." (Quran 9:51)

Separated parents are bombarded with questions about whether they are getting back together or how long they will remain "in limbo."

Ahmad believes we also have many "married single parents" in our community. It may sound like an oxymoron, but it's much more rampant than you imagine. It's a term coined for parents (mostly mothers) taking on all the parental responsibilities even while married. The fathers in such situations believe their job is only paying the bills. This uneven share of parenting is leaving children in seemingly regular homes grow up with a void from one parent's active involvement in their life.

COMMON STRUGGLES

Regardless of the type of single parent, one thing remains the same: the barrage of questions and lack of support.

"Why couldn't they work it out?"

"When will she remarry?"

"I wonder what he did that she left him" and so on.

Even though divorce among Muslims is on the rise, it is still considered taboo and against our faith.

"In the Prophet's time, both men and women used to get remarried multiple times. Whether it be because of death in battles, disease, or divorce, it was common to remarry," said Dr. Khan. "What we see in our community today is that after a certain age, women particularly, are not even considered for marriage."

"Remarriage is not bad, it's the sunnah," Hussein said. "But remarriage with children can be a minefield." Scholars are not addressing this. Blended or single parent families are not even brought up at seminars."

Dads are not off the hook either. "Those

that embrace Islam as single parents are definitely pushed towards marriage,” said Imam Pavlíček. “This can be harmful for new Muslims and even more so for their young children.”

“Why do people at the mosque feel compelled to point out who is *available*?” wondered Syed. “Let’s be realistic, available should not be mistaken for compatible or desirable. Having a peaceful life is more important than society’s approval. Introducing children to the possibility of a new figure in their lives is a huge undertaking. A toddler will react very differently than a teenager. Not everyone gets a fairytale.”

Another huge struggle for single parents is dealing with their former spouse. It becomes even harder if parenting styles and priorities are poles apart.

“When Palestinians get divorced, women are often encouraged to give the kids to their father, so they can get remarried easily,” said Hebeh Fares from Ohio. “However, I would never want to be away from my children, ages 7 and 4. If Allah wishes, I may find someone who loves me and my children.”

Co-parenting can become very triggering at times because of different parenting styles and priorities. However, she has learned that it’s all about picking your battles.

“I miss my kids terribly when they spend alternate weekends with their father, but I know Allah loves them more than I do, and they’ll be okay.”

Since single family homes are not discussed openly, kids often bear the brunt. When Syed’s daughter was growing up, other children would ask her “where’s your mom?”

“I tried to be there for her, but I could not be her mom.”

The Muslim community has some other unique struggles that prevent access to justice too,” said Maliha Siddiqui, a family law attorney in Chicago. There could be immigration issues with U.S. citizens marrying people abroad and then not enabling them to get the right paperwork once they are here. New immigrants or refugees could have financial literacy or language issues. There are legal aid organizations that help for free or on a sliding scale. However, they are overburdened and may not understand the cultural nuances of *iddah*, *mahar*, jewelry as heirlooms, etc.

Siddiqui is on the board of Muslim Bar Association of Chicago. She chairs the South Asian Bar Association of Chicago and volunteers at their monthly legal clinic. She can

Words Matter: Stop Saying Broken Homes

IT’S NOT JUST A CASE OF SEMANTICS WHEN there are feelings involved. Feelings and self-esteem of children who are not responsible for the fact that their parents are no longer together. Over the years, we have improved our vocabulary by using terms like mental health instead of mental illness, special needs instead of disabled, child custody is now parenting time, stepmom is now bonus mom. Similarly, we need to eradicate “broken homes” from our speech. Forever.

“This term is based on the dangerous assumption that “unbroken” homes are always better. Just the phrase broken home brings a judgment with it, not a fact,” said Dr. Khan. “Yes, divorce has implications and families with both parents present and having a healthy marital life is ideal; however, parental conflict with married parents may traumatize children far more than an amicable divorce. I have seen it a lot in my practice where parents who did not get along stayed together “for the kids” and it ended up being worse on the children’s mental health and personality development, something that has further implications on their adult lives.”

“The broken home sting isn’t limited to

childhood,” said Ahmad. “My former sister-in-law, an educated woman, said no one will marry my daughter because she comes from a broken home. It is just appalling.”

A broken home could be one in which two parents are living under one roof, but the environment is toxic. There is yelling, name calling and abuse, but just because mom and dad share an address, the kids are not considered to be from a broken home.

According to research from Harvard University, healthy brain development in

children *requires* consistency and stability from at least one parent. This does not mean children do not fare well in two-parent households. Children thrive when the marriage is healthy. But when it isn’t, the marital status does not determine how well the child will do. What matters most is children have at least one parent who is emotionally safe and who prioritizes happiness over living in fear.

“Children deserve happy parents more than they need married ones,” said Ahmad. “I remember reading this one day and it has stuck with me since.

If someone needs an alternate term to slap a label, then consider saying single parent home. **ib**



help people know what they could be entitled to as far as child support and parenting time goes. However, Muslims are often hesitant to come to these clinics because of “what will people say if they saw me here?” In that case, most attorneys also offer complimentary initial consultations.

HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP?

The community needs to invest time and money in creating special programs specifically for single parents. We need support from the *mimbars* (pulpit) and stories about brave single parents in Islamic history.

“Our community still doesn’t know how to talk about marriage properly, let alone divorce,” said Rashed* who was a single parent for more than a decade. “Single parents feel invisible in their mosque. It’s not like we have a disease that someone can catch. It’s ironic that something that was normalized in the time of the Prophet is so stigmatized today.”

“Someone once close to me said no one will invite you to events if you leave your husband. Families don’t want to mingle with single women,” said Ahmad. “I am proud to have proven her wrong today, but that thought was scary then.”

Imam Pavlíček believes the support offered to single moms in our community is getting better as the challenge becomes more common. However, events and support for single fathers is severely lacking. Consider a father that is desperately trying to keep his children involved in the Muslim community. Many children’s events are organized by women. The single dad may have to drop off his kids to the masjid hoping and praying that some sisters look out for them. The opposite is true too. Single moms with sons that hit the age of puberty are often told they can no longer bring them to the sisters’ gatherings. We must find alternatives.

We also need matrimonial services for single parents. Just like a physician may want

Eye-opening Stats

- 23% of U.S. children live with one parent. In contrast, 7% of the world's children are in single parent households.
- 80% of all single parents in the U.S. are single mothers.
- 15.6 million children live in single-mother households in the U.S.
- Only 46% of single parents receive full child support.
- 31% of single fathers are living with their own parents.
- Muslims are less likely than the general public to accept a divorcee as a spouse for their child.
- 61% of young Muslims wish their community provided more support to divorcees.

Source: U.S. Census, PEW, and ISPU



to marry someone in the same field because they may relate more to residency and match struggles, single parents may be able to relate better with one another too.

Community members need to know who lives around them. If they know the true circumstances without judgment, they may be able to offer childcare for a single parent who has no one as backup in case he needs to go out. Without perpetuating stereotypes, a single mom would appreciate her neighbors coming over to help assemble furniture or mount a TV. A single dad would be grateful if the family round the corner invites him for a home cooked meal on occasion.

Reach out to single parents and see how you can help. Never assume they are rolling in alimony payments even if their former spouse earns well. Coparents often go to great lengths to avoid paying. No one hears an automatic *ka-ching* in their bank account.

If a single parent is starting from scratch, see if you can help cosign a car loan or help them lease an apartment. They might qualify for government assistance like Medicaid or food stamps. Help them with the paperwork.

What community members should *not* do is give bad advice. "I've seen people tutor ex-husbands to pay attorneys to try every loophole to not pay alimony (now called maintenance) or child support," Ahmad said. "Such advice can be very damaging as it goes against the Islamic teachings of the father being responsible for his children's needs. It's their *haqq* (right). By robbing the children

of that right, you may consider it a legal win. But it can haunt you in this life and the Next."

HOW CAN SINGLE PARENTS HELP THEMSELVES?

"Sometimes mosques don't want to talk about single parent homes because they feel if they do, it can be misinterpreted as them advocating for divorce," said Farheen Khan, a certified elementary educator and Muslim parenting coach in Pennsylvania. "Muslims are not immune to this topic," Khan said. "It won't go away if we don't talk about it."

She wants to provide emotional validation to children who are too young to verbalize the emotions felt transitioning between parents' homes. So, she wrote a book called, "One Thing That Stays The Same...At My Mom's House and My Dad's House." Even though she hasn't included any specific Islamic traditions, it's the first children's book about single parent homes written by a Muslim.

"It is normal for children to feel a juxtaposition of emotions, feeling sad leaving one parent but excited to see the other parent," Khan said.

When parents are themselves in survival mode in a divorce or separation, it's hard for them to pinpoint what kids need. Through her online sessions and social media, Khan wants to help parents remain more child centered through divorce and beyond.

Single parents can also help their children by adapting to unique arrangements that work for their family.

"You need a good village to raise a child. They can benefit from multiple healthy role models," said Rashed. "Our Prophet was raised by his grandfather and uncle."

When it doesn't become a tribal war between dad's side of the family versus moms' side, kids win. Rashed worked hard with his first wife to come up with an arrangement that he feels worked out well. They decided that while the kids were young, they would stay with their mother. And high school onward they would stay primarily with their father.

"We have a problem with masculinity in our community," Rashed said. "If fathers are removed from the equation, the problem can get worse. We have a responsibility to both our sons and daughters to be healthy role models of manhood."

Even though her husband died, Hussein tries to have her daughter spend time with her uncles, so she has a positive male influence in her life.

Shabnam's* children were 2, 4, and 6 when she left her husband. "I left for my kids not to have to live in a toxic environment. I left for my mental health so I could be a strong parent for them. We are groomed in our culture to keep taking it. But we need to appreciate ourselves as human beings too."

Coming to a healthy co-parenting stage took a lot of time and tears. Even though it may sound surprising, she credits her ex-husband's new wife for being the best "angel mom" to her children.

Organizations Making a Real Difference

“MY LIFE TOOK A HORRIFIC TURN WHEN one day in winter, my children and I came home to find our belongings in bags outside our home,” said Hala*. With two children in tow, I spent the day at the nearest mall to stay warm, but when the mall was about to close, I knew I needed to find a place to stay for the night. I went from shelter to shelter, only to be turned away because they just didn’t have space. Finally, I found Nisa Homes online and called them straight away. *Alhumduillah*, they sent an Uber to pick us up and bring us to their Transitional Home. A caseworker was waiting to get us settled despite it being after hours. The women at Nisa Homes helped me secure a job in a local school. With this job, I was able to save enough to move my children into an apartment of our own and provide for them.”

Hala’s is just one story on the Nisa Homes blog. In a society where many sweep domestic violence under the rug, there are some that become agents of change.

Muslims are not immune to domestic violence and abuse. If critical services are not offered, battered women could have to continue living in dangerous circumstances. Abusers can become more enabled when they feel they can get away with anything. Research has shown that if women are able to connect with their community, they have a better chance of recovering from trauma.

Nisa Homes is the leading Muslim organization in Canada with 9 transitional homes

in 5 provinces. A transitional home is not a domestic violence shelter. It is a safe place for women to get back on their feet again. 63% of the clients that come to Nisa Homes face domestic violence, 21% are homeless, 11% are refugees, and 5% face poverty.

Nisa Homes envisions a flourishing Muslim community in which help is available, shelter is attainable, and healing is possible. They provide confidential counseling, financial assistance, help with immigration status, a children’s program, spiritual support, and much more. They provide assistance in Arabic, Urdu, Somali, and Gujarati. Find out more at www.nisahomes.com

ICNA Relief is also making strides with 24 transitional homes across the U.S. In 2022 alone, they had helped 166 women and 101 children with housing needs. Since 2009, they have helped provide more than 27,000 nights of safety to women and children.

Their caseworkers vet clients who meet their eligibility criteria and are willing to follow the program. Transitional housing means that the women are motivated to look for work and become independent - ideally within six months. ICNA Relief helps by providing them with mentors who help direct them towards government assistance, job search, English classes, driving lessons, and so on. ICNA Relief maintains the dignity of their clients while affording them the opportunity to heal and develop themselves within a nurturing environment. Find out more at www.icnarelief.org/transitional-housing *ib*

“I literally prayed for her, so I refer to her as my kids’ angel mom,” Shabnam said. “My kids get two loving moms, and it has helped bring my kids closer to their father. If I had wished bad for him, I could be causing generational trauma for my kids.

In return she includes her children’s new brother in as many activities as she can. He really enjoys spending time with his older siblings even if they do live in a separate home.

Single parents should refrain from bad-mouthing the other parent. You may be hurt (and broke) from the divorce but wanting your kids to hate their mom or dad may backfire and end up with kids hating both parents. Kids are not the pawns with which you get back at your former spouse.

If coparents “part with goodness” as recommended by our faith, they may not have to spend as much time and money in the

court system. Unfortunately, however, that doesn’t usually happen. A peaceful co-parenting situation is what a child needs. But if your ex-spouse was understanding and cooperative, they might not be an ex today. That’s when you need the law.

LEGALITIES

Siddiqui hopes single parents understand that until the children are minors, their ex can keep coming back to the court system. That can be a good thing too as checks and balances ensure orders are respected. That’s why it’s crucial for parents not to rush the parenting plan in their divorce process.

You might feel you’ve spent enough time and money on the case, and you want to wrap up as soon as possible. But every line of the parenting plan is important. There is a basic template, but attorneys can help you add or subtract things that best suit your family. It’s



not just about who gets to spend Eid al Fitr with the kids. It could also include which mosque they would follow for Eid day if there is a difference.

Parents should also have reasonable expectations. Unless there are significant safety concerns, the law requires minor children to spend time with both parents. Both mothers and fathers need to put their ego aside and do what is in the best interest of the child. A child should ideally have a healthy relationship with both parents. This can set the foundation for them to have healthy relationships with their own spouses one day.

“My advice to clients with high conflict co-parents is to track everything on a calendar. Try to minimize in-person conversations as judges need proof of everything,” said Siddiqui. “Also, please don’t vent about your ex on social media. It can come back to bite you.”

THIS TOO SHALL PASS

The initial years post death or divorce are usually the hardest. Single parents find it hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But Allah does not burden any soul more than he or she can bear. Yes, it takes time, court appearances, boat loads of money, and many sleepless nights. But it does get better eventually. Some single parents find peace on their own. Others are happily remarried. Kids get older and parenting time squabbles fizzle out.

Syed’s four-month-old daughter is now a teenager and the center of his happiness. Ahmad feels all that stress and money was worth it for the peace and dignity with which she can raise her children today. *ib*

Kiran Ansari is the Assistant Editor of Islamic Horizons. She has been living in the suburbs of Chicago for the last 24 years.

*Few names have been changed for confidentiality

War in Sudan

Humanitarian Crisis Not Making Headlines

BY SUNDUS ABRAR



AS SEID AL FITR DREW NEAR, ON APRIL 15, violent clashes erupted in Khartoum, Sudan, between two military groups. The Sudanese Armed forces (SAF), led by Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly referred to as Hemeti, surrounded civilians who were unprepared for the perilous days ahead.

The SAF and the RSF comprise around 100,000 members on each side. Both are organized and well armed with military equipment which is being actively used in the power struggle for control. The conflict is heaviest, but not limited to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. West Sudan, an area which has a painful history of conflict, is also again experiencing unrest.

It is often difficult to differentiate and assign responsibility to either the SAF or RSF for the consistent bombings and fire exchanges with neither side bearing responsibility. Multiple negotiated cease fires have been violated, and peace talks being held in Saudi Arabia are stalling. The only certainty is that conditions are worsening. 700,000 Sudanese are now displaced internally as they move out of affected areas. More than 150,000 have become refugees in neighboring states.

Civilians are experiencing dire circumstances like shortages of food, water, medical supplies, and electricity. Nada Osman,



a Sudanese-American settled in Northern Virginia and founder of renowned cosmetics brand, Sudaniya, is very concerned for her family. "We are always waiting to hear back from them. Power outages and limited network reception in Khartoum make it difficult to maintain contact," she said.

The humanitarian crisis is worsening. Banks are closed, and cash is in short supply. Scarcely available items are exorbitantly priced. Lawlessness looms. Looting and destruction are commonplace as factories, hospitals, stores and other facilities are obliterated. The crisis is further exacerbated by an attack on a prison in Kobar, a sister city of Khartoum. This resulted in the release of dangerous prisoners. The disregard for civilian safety leaves residents with two hard options: evacuate or shelter in place.

EVACUATION STRUGGLES

As the SAF and RSF continue warring in an attempt to gain control of prominent bases to establish rule, Khartoum is becoming more dangerous. The only accessible way

out is by road. There are military checkpoints throughout the city at which interactions can be unpredictable, and at times fatal. "People fleeing have done so with only the clothes on their back," Osman said. "Driving away in personal cars is rarely feasible due to limited gas, and also not advisable as it exposes the passengers to become targets of violence."

Aasiya*, a 17-year-old Sudanese-American, is a first year law student at University of Medical Sciences and Technology, Khartoum, Sudan. When the war started, Aasiya's mother was reassured that her daughter who had been residing at the university dorm would be prioritized by the U.S. State Department because of her U.S. citizenship and status as a minor. However, the U.S. government classified her as a private citizen, and initially offered no plan ensuring safety. By the time the first option of a U.S. convoy was available on April 27, almost two weeks into the crisis, Aasiya had already arrived in Aswan, Egypt. She had to risk a long, expensive, and unpredictable journey with her aunt's family. It involved multiple bus rides, canceled routes, and hiring a private car. "We were on the street and could hear shooting from a distance," Aasiya said. "We left in such a hurry with hardly anything because we didn't have time to pack. We just had water and a little food. We sprinted to the bus as it filled up."

The challenges of evacuation mean that it is not feasible for the elderly, and others with fragile health. They are all already struggling due to limited access to hospitals and diminished medical supplies. Osman received the tragic news of the death of an uncle who was not able to receive life saving oxygen in time. A cousin of hers waited two days to receive medical care after suffering from a stroke. While these family members had limited mobility due to their health, others have decided to remain in Khartoum to protect their homes. They are worried about leaving because unoccupied properties are being taken over by the Rapid Support Forces.

Dr. Bushra Ibnauf, a Sudanese-American doctor and founding member of humanitarian organization, Sudanese American Medical Association (SAMA) stayed in Khartoum to care for his aging parents. He was killed on April 25, one of the more than 600 civilian lives lost to this war. More than 5,000 people have also been wounded. His wife and four children live in Iowa. Dr. Saleh Abusin, a Sudanese Cardiologist in Chicago, and a close friend of Dr Ibnauf, shared that

he was also attacked by rogue criminals in front of his house.

The SAF and RSF first assumed power together following a military coup which they led together to oust long term President Omar Al Bashir who ruled for 30 years. The coup was in response to a persistent civil movement for a democratic government. The SAF and RSF formed a Transitional Military Council after the coup, and were met with ongoing protests for democratic rule. The civilian led groups for Sudan's long due democracy have been subjected to brutal violence by the military, particularly the RSF, who originated from the Janjawid militia and were incorporated as a paramilitary group under Al Bashir. The SAF and RSF are also accused of continued human right violations and the genocide in Darfur. Despite these transgressions The SAF and RSF have managed to maintain their positions of power by ensuring close participation in negotiations with the resistance movement for a democratic civilian government.

Sudanese-American Nisreen Elamin, who teaches at the University of Toronto's Department of African Studies, evacuated at the start of the war with her daughter and parents. "The problem is that since Al Bashir was overthrown, the Transitional Military Council took over, and we got into these protracted processes of negotiation. Throughout that process the balance of power has always been tipped in favor of the military regime."

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Even as the civil movement presses on for democratic rule, the military continues to evade it. A democratic rule could hold the SAF and RSF accountable for their vast atrocities. A major contributor to this is international involvement. Sudan is a resource-rich country, and has drawn vast corporate investments despite the prevalently contested military led rule. Though the pro-democratic movement has continually sought a civilian led government without military involvement, the international response continues to include General Burhan and General Hemeti in negotiations. The advantage of familiarity with the military regime for the international community ensures stability for their own corporate interests. Conversely, the pro-democratic resistance movement aims to rearrange Sudan's economic structure to prioritize the interests of civilians. This is a significant factor in the continual oversight of the involved international



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countries and their failure to acknowledge the demands of the pro-democratic movement for no military oversight.

The SAF and RSF have been meeting in Saudi Arabia for peace talks mediated by the U.S. and Saudi. Neither military faction is willing to work towards an end to the fighting, and consideration is only being given to passageways for humanitarian aid and civilian safety. The complete absence of civilian representation in these peace talks further validates the generals in their roles. As the deadlock holds in peace negotiations the international response for Sudanese safety and exit out of the country is insufficient. The UN World Food Program states that millions of dollars worth of food was looted in Khartoum. Also, because more than 15 humanitarian aid workers have

been killed, UN agencies temporarily suspended work.


A shift in international responsibility can be instrumental in alleviating this crisis. "If only the U.S. and European countries would just open their borders like they did for the Ukrainians to provide special emergency status refugee status to people," said Aasiya's mother, Faria* deeply feeling the inadequacy of the U.S. response. They believe this negligence is fueled by racism and Islamophobia. In the midst of the unrelenting warfare, the Sudanese community feels overlooked. "When I drive around, I see Ukrainian flags, but there is nothing for Sudan," Osman said.

NEED FOR AID

The immediate concern is for humanitarian needs. Expectations of political outcomes have been cast aside for now. Given the resiliency of the civil movement, political outcomes being a secondary concern is a grave marker of the human suffering in Sudan. "The only thing we want is for them to stop killing us," said Dr. Abusin. "At least stop killing us so we can bury the people. There are bodies on the street. Let others evacuate safely."

Sudan urgently requires humanitarian aid. Dr Abusin, treasurer of humanitarian group SAMA, believes the Muslim community can do more. "There is always room for improvement, there is room for more engagement and we desperately need the funding" he said. SAMA is currently working on the ground in Sudan with a focus on providing medical care. In the absence of international aid, other Sudanese-led local organizations like SAMA are a lifeline in the crisis.

The Sudanese need to be trusted as the ones most informed about their needs as they work towards their goals of freedom, peace, and justice. Their experiences and voices should be heard and amplified when they call on the world. To stay informed about this unfolding crisis, to donate, or learn about local protests, follow the hashtag #eyesonsudan and visit www.eyesonsudan.net

"What's really allowing people to survive right now is the resistance committees on the ground," Elamin said. "It's the Sudanese people themselves who at great risk are providing all this lifesaving work that the international aid agencies usually provide." 

*These names have been changed for security concerns.

Sundus Abrar is a freelance writer of Pakistani descent, currently residing in Chicago.

The Revenge of the “Police State”

Tunisian democracy continues taking harsh blows

BY MONIA MAZIGH



BENDIR MAN, A POPULAR TUNISIAN popular singer lived abroad and wrote songs denouncing and making satire about the then-President Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali regime.

In a Tunisian adaptation of the famous Italian folk song “Bella Ciao,” he ended his “Habiba Ciao” version released in 2010. He related the story of an illegal migrant to Italy with the last sentence being, “I will return to the country of the police.” This was an allusion to Tunisia’s “police state” run by policemen (Ben Ali, himself was a military officer).

This line from the song is one of the best descriptions of what Ben Ali achieved over his 23 year reign. He made Tunisia into a police state granting powers to police officers and their superiors who controlled Tunisian lives at every step. They were spied on in their neighborhoods and humiliated through random arrests. They were requesting and receiving bribes, holding their passports or other official documents as means to prevent them from traveling or applying for jobs.

It isn’t a coincidence that Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who set himself on fire in December 2010, was doing it in an act of despair against the policewoman who slapped him in the face and confiscated

his merchandise and wooden stand. Nor was it a coincidence that the huge protests, held after Bouazizi’s death in January 2011, were concentrated in the capital city of Tunis in front of the ministry of interior’s gloomy building, which represented both the system’s brutality and its oppression. For years, during both Presidents Bourguiba (d. 2000), considered as the father of the independence, and Ben Ali, the arrests of dissidents and their torture happened behind that building’s thick grey walls.

During the decade that followed Ben Ali’s departure and the beginning of the Arab Spring, democratic institutions were built in Tunisia to replace the ministry of interior’s arbitrary powers. They gradually dismantled the opaque network that over two decades weaved an iron shield against the implementation of the rule of law, participated in the maintenance of dictatorship, and oppressed voices that called for democratic reforms.

Despite some mitigated successes, all the democratic building process came to a halt on July 25, 2021, when the elected president Kaies Saied grabbed all power, suspended the legally elected People’s Assembly and dissolved many of these democratic institutions that played the roles of checks and balances.

Saied wouldn’t have been successful in his somber endeavors if it wasn’t for the reemergence of the “police state.” Today it is taking revenge against all the changes that occurred during that era often described by many media commentators as the “decade of destruction.”

Last February a crackdown on prominent figures including opposition politicians, activists, protest organizers and a media figure as well as an influential business leader and two judges marked the descent into hell. Indeed, the arrest of liberal secular oppositions figures like Ghazi Chaouchi (secretary-general of the Democratic Current), Cheima Issa (poet and journalist) and Khayam Turki (a former finance minister), is a clear indication that not only the “police state” is back at work but also striking hard. With that crackdown, Saied signaled that he isn’t mainly focused on the Islamist politicians. He is targeting all forms of dissent.

Last April, Rached Ghannouchi, 81, leader of the Islamist Party Ennahdha and speaker of the suspended People Assembly was arrested a few minutes before iftar on the 26th of Ramadan, a very symbolic day, given Ghannouchi’s religious background. For about two years, since the coup by Saied, Ghannouchi has been brought to testify in front of judges and interrogated in several cases against him and was always released.

More recently, a judge sentenced Ghannouchi, in absentia, to a year in prison and a fine of 1000 Tunisian dinars (equivalent to \$323). According to his lawyer, Ghannouchi had been found guilty on charges of incitement. Ghannouchi’s daughter, Soumaya, who made short videos on social media defending her father, explained that her father’s “crime” was to use the word “*taghut*” during the eulogy of one of his former colleague and member of the Ennahdha party. “*Taghut*”, is a word used several times in the Quran.

However, what many Tunisians ignore is that the police officers in Tunisia despise the word “*taghut*” as for years it was implicitly directed at them. It is Sayed Qutb (d. 1966),

an Egyptian religious thinker who originally wrote extensively about “*taghut*” and oppressive regimes and how Muslims should break free from them through God’s path. On the ground, the word “*taghut*,” which literally means tyranny, came to represent for many Islamist activists, the torture and imprisonment that happened to many of them and their families under the hands of police officers and agents who protected the repressive regimes in many Arab Muslim countries including Tunisia.

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The symbolism of making the use of such words as “criminal” or equivalent to “incitement against the state” and the fact that it is one police officer who sued Ghannouchi for using this word and the fact that a judge ruled in the police officer’s favor are clear indications that Tunisia is back to its “police state” roots.

Another evidence of the “police state” playing at full swing is an incident that happened during the Tunis International Book Fair. Police officers in civilian clothing, suddenly shut down the pavilion of a publishing house, Dar El Kiteb, hours after Saied had inaugurated the event. The reason was a recently published book by a Tunisian author who lives in Canada, Kamel Riahi. The book, *The Tunisian Frankenstein*, a criticism of the populist president, with a depiction of Saied and a chainsaw on its cover, was at the heart of the incident.

Many journalists and activists took to social media and denounced this flagrant censorship as very similar to the Ben Ali era. Articles were written about it in the international media. Some journalists even reported that a few days after the book was seized, police officers visited some bookstores and asked the owners about the names and addresses of those who bought the book. The same old ridiculous and scary tactics used by dictatorial regimes. When the public pressure against this act of censorship reached high

levels, the President ironically came out publicly in one the capital bookstore and bought few copies of the same book and insisted on the importance of “freedom of thinking.”


On May 15, a student and amateur rapper accompanied by two friends, posted a parody of a song (once again songs are tools of denouncing police brutality) on his TikTok account. The children’s song is originally from the “Elephant Babar,” an animated series. However, this version isn’t for children. It talks about a father. Baba is in

Arabic the word for father, a word similar to Babar. It talks about a young man, looking for his son in all the police districts after police sweep a neighborhood and arrest his kid for smoking weed. Use and possession of cannabis is illegal in Tunisia despite the increasing number of young consumers. Even though the satiric song was kind of innocent and represented a true and sad reality, the police felt entitled to move quickly and restore that “law and order” approach that represented them for years before “they” felt pushed aside during the last decade. It took a message from Saied to order the liberation of the students. Once again, he came out as a savior. A kind of the “nice guy” who is protecting his own people.

Beyond these examples, the situation in Tunisia remains bleak and very troubling. Journalists and bloggers who document police abuse or dare to criticize the president are arrested. Ennahda, the main opposition, is now almost banned with most of its leaders in prison and demonized. Iconic opposition leaders like Ahmed Néjib Chebbi whose party fought dictatorship under Bourguiba’s regime and Ben Ali’s, are mocked publicly and intimidated by the same police.

Unfortunately, today democracy doesn’t seem to be on the radar of many Tunisians. However, when Tunisian youth, *harraga*, drown crossing the sea trying to reach the

European shore, and when governmental authorities secretly bury their bodies without informing their parents and families, like what happened last fall in the southern city of Zarzis, the families are angry and organize to push back against the injustice. Again, when a former football player sets himself on fire and tragically dies, after a fight with local police officers around the price of bananas in market that the President fixed the price at five dinars to appease the population during Ramadan, the family and friends of the footballer are outraged.

Perhaps for now the fate of prominent politicians wouldn’t bother the common people. However, these small and seemingly isolated incidents are creating new stories and a new reality about the return of the “police state.” This is when people would feel directly affected in their daily lives, in their children’s safety and their own future. Only then, the population would realize how the “police state” came back to haunt them. And perhaps, they will go back again to build a real democracy. 

Monia Mazigh, PhD, an academic, author and human rights activist, is an adjunct professor at Carleton University (Ontario). She has published “Hope and Despair: My Struggle to Free My Husband, Maher Arar” (2008) and three novels, “Mirrors and Mirages” (2015), “Hope Has Two Daughters” (2017) and “Farida” (2020), which won the 2021 Ottawa Book Award prize for French-language fiction. She is currently working on a collection of essays about gendered Islamophobia.

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Examining the Mirage

Critical Reflections on the New Saudi-Iran Relations

BY KHALED A. BEYDOUN

THE RECENT WAVE OF OPTIMISM SURROUNDING new Saudi-Iran relations demands a critical examination that transcends the surface-level narrative of reconciliation. While it is tempting to view thawing tensions as a positive development for regional stability, a closer look reveals underlying motives and complexities that warrant skepticism. This commentary delves into the nuanced realities of the Saudi-Iran relations, shedding light on the potential pitfalls and challenges that may hinder true progress in the region – and that may reveal that these promising relations are more mirage than mandate.

The notion of a genuine reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran appears elusive when one considers the history of animosity, sectarian tensions, and competing regional ambitions that have shaped their relationship. Indeed, the bloody war in Yemen stands as a stark case study of the rivalry between the two regional powers, which decimated a people – the poorest nation in the region in fact – interlocked between. The sudden shift in discourse could be seen as a strategic maneuver rather than a sincere commitment to lasting peace. Both nations may be engaging in a superficial rapprochement to gain leverage in the international arena, rather than addressing the root causes of their conflicts and ideological differences. While this offers common terrain to commence sustainable relations, it can also be precarious ground.

Behind the veneer of diplomatic gestures lies a geopolitical power play. Saudi Arabia and Iran have long vied for influence in the Middle East and the Arab world, with each seeking to establish its hegemony over the region along sectarian and political lines. The recent détente may be a calculated move to gain an upper hand in this ongoing struggle for dominance. By presenting a façade of unity, both nations may seek to weaken their regional rivals and secure their own geopolitical interests, rather than working towards genuine cooperation and stability.

Religious sectarianism has played a significant role in fueling tensions between



Saudi Arabia and Iran have long vied for influence in the Middle East and the Arab world, with each seeking to establish its hegemony over the region along sectarian and political lines. The recent détente may be a calculated move to gain an upper hand in this ongoing struggle for dominance. By presenting a façade of unity, both nations may seek to weaken their regional rivals and secure their own geopolitical interests, rather than working towards genuine cooperation and stability.

Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both have exploited the Sunni and Shia schism to advance their respective agendas. The current rapprochement does not address the deep-seated ideological divisions that underpin the Saudi-Iran conflicts. Without a genuine

effort to bridge these differences and promote religious tolerance, any semblance of reconciliation will remain superficial and susceptible to renewed sectarian strife.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been embroiled in proxy conflicts across the Middle East for years, with devastating consequences for the region's stability. While the new relations may suggest a willingness to de-escalate tensions, the reality on the ground tells a different story. Both nations continue to support rival factions in conflicts such as Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, exacerbating the very divisions they claim to be addressing. Until there is a genuine commitment to end proxy warfare and support inclusive political solutions, the prospects for lasting peace will remain bleak. While the commitment to end the war in Yemen is a promising step, expanding the cessation of proxy wars beyond Yemen will evidence the depth and sustainability of these new relations.

Beyond politics and geopolitics, the Saudi-Iran relations cannot be divorced from their abysmal human rights records. Saudi Arabia's record of suppressing dissent, detaining activists, and violating human rights is well-documented. Iran, too, has faced criticism for its crackdown on political dissidents and curtailment of civil liberties. True progress in the region cannot be achieved without addressing these human rights concerns and holding both nations accountable for their actions. Without a commitment to respect human rights, any claims of reconciliation may prove narrow.

While the idea of improved Saudi-Iran relations may be seductive, particularly during the decline of the War on Terror and the rise of regional pride, a critical examination reveals a more complex and uncertain reality. Superficial gestures, geopolitical calculations, sectarian divisions, proxy conflicts, and human rights abuses continue to overshadow any semblance of genuine progress. Only through a comprehensive and sincere commitment to addressing these underlying issues can Saudi Arabia and Iran truly contribute to regional stability. Until then, we must approach the narrative of a new era in their relations with caution and skepticism, lest we fall prey to a mirage of peace in the Middle East. [ib](#)

Khaled A. Beydoun is a professor at the Wayne State School of Law, and Scholar-in-Residence at the Initiative for a Representative First Amendment at Harvard University. He is a native of Detroit, and author of the critically acclaimed *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (2019).

Is there Caste Apartheid in the United States?

Americans Rising to Outlaw Caste Oppression

BY SHAKEEL SYED

GROWING HINDU-AMERICAN support for the Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) movement has triggered community conversations and political opposition to the caste-based discrimination in the U.S. Several reported caste-based discrimination cases, especially in the tech industry and academia has led Dalits — The Untouchables, the lowest caste — to organize a campaign to address the growing caste apartheid in the U.S.

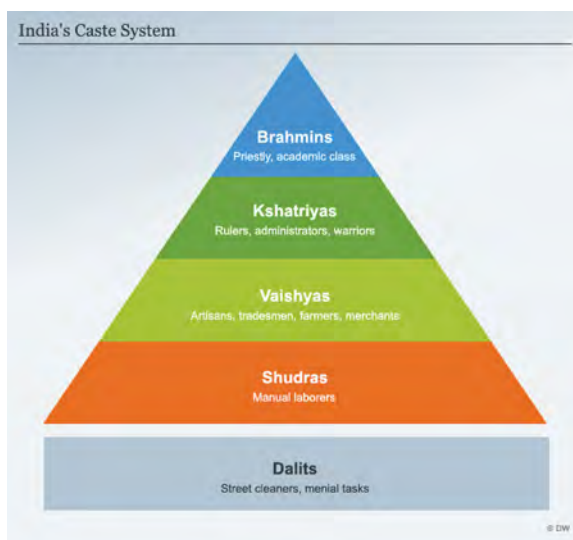
According to the social historical theory, the origin of the caste system finds its origin in the arrival of Aryans in India around 1500 BC.

The proliferation of Hindutva beyond India has been hastened by the Modi government dominated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The current regime in India has invested significantly in building and strengthening ties with the Hindu diaspora community in the U.S. and U.K., making them feel invested as stakeholders in India's future at the global stage.

Conversely, a recent report titled, "Hindu Nationalist Influence in the United States (2014-2021): The Infrastructure of Hindutva Mobilizing," lists names and activities of U.S.-based Hindutva groups of 24 U.S. Hindu nationalist organizations that have spent over \$158 million on various projects, including sending money to India.

Prof. Audrey Truschke, a historian at Rutgers University, is reported to have said that "the Sangh (Hindutva movement's mother organization) began establishing Hindu nationalist groups overseas since 1940s. Many such diaspora organizations have been part of the social fabric of their respective nations — generally working for far-right goals — for decades"

Against this backdrop and unable to exercise their right to protest in India, the



Unable to exercise their right to protest in India, the caste-oppressed Dalits in the U.S. have started speaking up against the discrimination and oppression they have been subject to by the age-old caste based hierarchical system.

caste-oppressed Dalits in the U.S. have started speaking up against the discrimination and oppression they have been subjected to by the age-old old caste based hierarchical system.

In February this year, Seattle became the first U.S. city to outlaw caste discrimination after its local council passed a resolution, moved by an Indian American politician and economist, to add caste to its non-discrimination policy. The Seattle City Council approved the resolution by six to one.

Seattle was followed by the Toronto District School Board that made history by passing the first ever resolution in Canadian legislative history accepting the reality of caste discrimination and vowing to combat it.

CALIFORNIA SENATOR RALLIES FOR CHANGE

Aisha Wahab, a refugee from Afghanistan and a first-time elected California Senator from Central California has successfully advanced her bill SB-403 out of the California State Senate voting 34-1 to ban caste-based discrimination.

Dalit activists along with human rights groups like Amnesty and civil rights and civil liberty groups like ACLU and scores of community-based organizations (including the one that the author of this article leads) and several interfaith groups will continue their advocacy for the passing of SB-403 by the Assembly followed by the signing into law by the Governor of California.

California is home to Apple, Google, Meta, and Cisco along with offices of Amazon and Microsoft and many others. Over the years, California, which is home to about 1.8 million people of South Asian descent, has consistently reported incidents of caste discrimination.

In 2020, a former Cisco employee filed a lawsuit alleging caste discrimination at work. John Doe said he was treated differently, excluded from meetings and promotions, and subjected to offensive remarks and jokes because of his caste. As noted in vice.com, following the Cisco case, as many as 250 employees from these giant corporations and a dozen other organizations in Silicon Valley came forward to report discrimination, bullying, ostracization, and even sexual harassment by colleagues of the dominant caste.

According to a Washington Post report,

30 Dalit women engineers in Silicon Valley spoke of gender and caste bias in the tech industry.

As an Indian American Muslim living in California, I strongly support SB-403 not only for its meritorious premise but also to repent my implicit biases toward Dalits during my formative years growing up in India.

For those readers who may not know about the caste system, here's a primer:

Put briefly, the "caste system is a four-fold division of Hindu society founded on ethnicity and arranged on the basis of ascending order of reverence and descending degree of contempt."

Often, when people of Hindu tradition migrate to the U.S. from cultures (predominantly India) where caste is prevalent, the practices of exclusion are replicated here. Its tentacles spread and impact hundreds of millions of Indians and more than five million Hindu-Americans in the U.S.

The hierarchical caste pyramid has no parallel in other traditions.

For example, the differences between Sunnis and Shias in Islam or Catholics and Protestants in Christianity do not claim permanent superiority of one over the other. In Hinduism, Brahmanism claims its permanent superiority over the Untouchables. "A Brahmin cannot become an Untouchable and an Untouchable cannot become a Brahmin. There is neither promotion nor demotion under Hinduism.

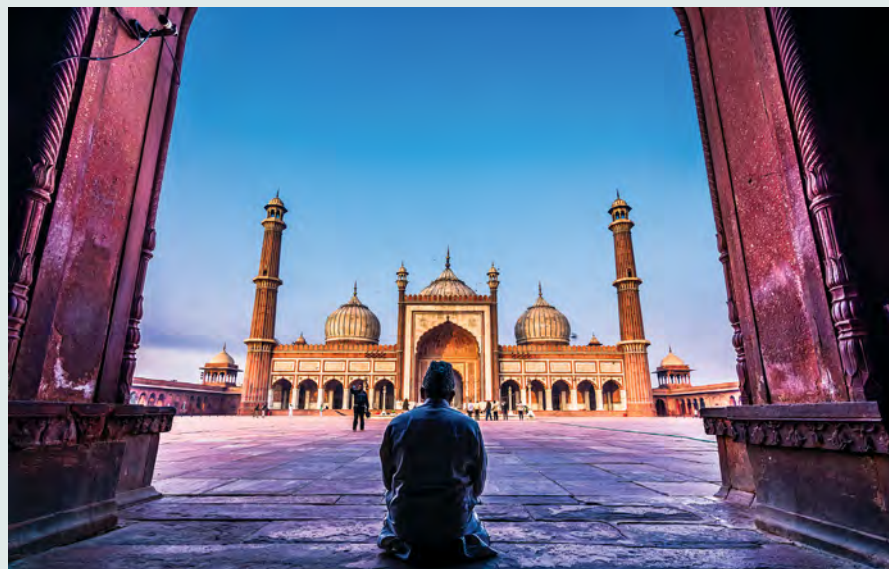
"In Christianity and Islam, society is mobile, under Hinduism, society is static. Fixed. Caste is decided based on birth, not merit or scholarship." This is set to change with the California Anti-Caste Bill SB 403.

As a member of Californians for Caste Equity, a coalition of caste-oppressed organizations, unions, interfaith organizations, lawyers, and academicians, I applaud Sen. Wahab for taking up this cause and working to add caste as a protected category to California's present discrimination policy. Bill SB 403 will bring more awareness towards caste-based discrimination, and it will begin to end the caste apartheid in America. **ib**

Shakeel Syed is the Executive Director of South Asian Network.

The Indian Muslim: Despair and Hope

BY AMIR ULLAH KHAN



THE SITUATION MUST HAVE BEEN DIRE just after the partition of the South Asian subcontinent in 1947. A new country had taken birth and millions of people across both borders were displaced. In India, particularly in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, it was difficult being a Muslim. The atmosphere became grim again in 1965, during the India Pakistan war when Muslims were being asked to prove their loyalties. Are Indian Muslims in a similar situation today?

The ruling coalition is making calls for genocide. Ruling chief ministers of big states are gloating about closing *madrasahs*. Prominent leaders talk about banning Urdu and courts are upholding bans on wearing head scarves.

The outlook does appear bleak. But what makes it worse is that there is enough evidence of state complicity in all this persecution. Even in the worst of post-partition times, and during the wars with Pakistan, the state was clear on its neutral position. The constitution swore by secularism and the law makers were bound by the law of the land. Today, the government indulges in extrajudicial killings, demolishes mosques despite court orders, and state laws disallow Muslims from buying property legitimately.

There is even more despair when we see the reaction among Muslims. But for a

small group of intrepid journalists, mostly women, there is a sense of dread. Most of the Muslim leadership has shrunk into a fetal position, particularly in North and Central India. Prominent Muslim intellectuals and former bureaucrats make feeble and desperate attempts at reaching out to the same organizations that support calls for genocide and argue for a second-class status for Muslims. Nowhere is this pusillanimity more obvious than when judges of the highest court pass controversial judgements, and soon after accept post-retirement positions that reek of a quid pro quo.

Justice Nazeer Ahmed's case is an eye opener. As a Supreme Court judge, he retired in January this year, after signing off on the most bizarre Babri Masjid judgment. He led the Constitution bench that declared that demonetization was not illegal, even as his colleague Justice Navarathna had categorically ruled that the process was faulty. Demonetization was easily one of the most devastating policy decisions ever taken by Modi. The Prime Minister had announced, without notice or explanation, a sudden ban on some currency bills on Nov. 8, 2016. Within forty days of his retirement, he was appointed the governor of Andhra Pradesh, a position he accepted and occupies today.

The dilemma that Muslim political leadership faces now is indeed reflective of the situation. Ghulam Nabi Azad, a member of the Congress Party and a formidable opposition leader for nearly 50 years, speaks helplessly in favor of Modi. Azam Khan of the Samajwadi Party gets a three-year jail term and spends 27 months there before getting bailed out. Religious leaders have been jailed under charges that were as bizarre as that of Muslims spreading Covid in the country. Now there are no Muslims in Narendra Modi's cabinet. The ruling party does not have a single Muslim member of Parliament. What is even more heartless, is that there isn't any Muslim member of the BJP in any legislative assembly in any state.

On the economic front, discrimination against Muslims has been on the rise for the last few years. This moved from a subtle call for boycotts against Muslims businesses to a violent attack on Muslim shopkeepers and hawkers. Muslims continue to lag behind everyone in access to electricity. Nearly 30% of Muslims in the poorest states are living without electricity even today.

On unemployment, the government's own data makes a blunt point. Comparing data from the 61st round of the National Sample Survey on employment-unemployment (2004-05) to the Periodic Labor Force Survey in 2018-19 and 2019-20 and the All-India Debt and Investment Survey by the federal government, it is evident that there is a clear increase in inequality and discrimination against Muslims when it comes to access to jobs, income, health and agricultural credit across the country.

The data shows that unequal incomes are not only due to poor access to education or work experience but predominantly because of discrimination. Discrimination is the primary reason behind the falling Muslim Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in the country. According to the government's own data, as per the Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, among all populations, it is the Muslims that have the lowest share of working people. The LFPR for Indian Muslims has been consistently decreasing from 42.7% in 2004-05 to 30% in 2021. This shows the withdrawal of Muslims from the workforce despite rapid national economic growth in the same period.

In 2019-20, 40% of all non-Muslim populations aged 15 years and more had regular salaried and self-employed jobs. In contrast, these numbers were only 30% for similarly aged Muslims. This number has fallen sharply

since 2015, with another sharp decrease seen during Covid.

While Muslims face the most discrimination in today's India, the numbers also show that the workforce is also unfair to Dalits and indigenous groups. The average income for all vulnerable and marginalized groups in cities in India and are in regular employment is ₹15312 (\$186). The upper castes doing the same work get paid ₹20346 (\$247) a month, at least 25% more, according to government data. It is also important to note that this wage differential is among those who are in regular work, and they comprise just 10% of India's workforce.

It is a moot point on what kind of wage differentials exist in the unorganized and the informal economy where a large proportion of the marginalized minorities work. Most Muslims self-employed. The average earning for those self-employed is ₹15878 (\$192) for the upper castes and ₹10533 (\$128) for Muslims, lower castes and tribal populations. According to a 2022 Oxfam discrimination report, unequal income among urban casual wage workers is because of 79% discrimination in 2019-20.

While there was a general increase in unemployment during COVID, what was alarming was that in rural areas, the sharpest increase of 17 percent in unemployment was for Muslims. While 15.6% of urban Muslims aged 15 and above had regular salaried jobs, 23.3% of non-Muslims had regular salaried jobs in 2019-20. The Oxfam report estimates that the lower employment for urban Muslims is largely due to discrimination (68%) in 2019-20. While discrimination has always existed, the levels were different. The discrimination faced by Muslims in 2014 was 59.3% and has been increasing over the years.

While much has been written about the rise in hate crimes, lynching and police atrocities, it is important to note the increase in this kind of economic discrimination. The distressing point is that the violence against Muslims now is increasingly normalized. It is either ignored by the state or even encouraged by prominent leaders who support communal forces. It is a rational step for a politician, as it fetches votes and helps majoritarian consolidation.

What then is the solution? Where does hope come from? India is a great country and is growing fast despite all its problems. The solution must emerge from this growth. As the economy becomes stronger, identity issues and ethnic strife automatically take a back seat as we saw during the first decade of the new millennium. There is a constant pushback, within the boundaries of geopolitical realities,

from foreign governments and agencies that ensures that the state responds. Just like it did in the hate speech on Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) where Nupur Sharma, a BJP spokesperson, was suspended from the ruling party.

The recent Karnataka election also shows that maybe, at least in states with higher levels of human development and industrial activities, there is a growing ennui against religious polarization. The voter did categorically dismiss religious slogans and propaganda movies, aimed at stirring the communal pot. Most of the ruling party allies, the Akali Dal in Punjab and the Thackeray faction of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh have distanced themselves and are in the opposition now.

Finally, there is the Supreme Court, which under a new and assertive chief, Sharad Arvind Bobde, has underlined the basic structure of the constitution and constantly reminds the government of its duties and obligations. Therein lies the biggest hope for the world's largest constitutional democracy. **ib**

Amir Ullah Khan, Ph.D., is professor of economics at the Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of the Government of Telangana, Hyderabad, India.

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Mandela's Grandson Calls for Palestinian Liberation on U.S. Tour

"The Palestinian apartheid is worse than anything we experienced" - Mandela

BY SANDRA WHITEHEAD



ON MAY 21, THE GRANDSON OF anti-Apartheid activist and South Africa's first president, Nelson Mandela boarded a 16-hour flight from Chicago back to Cape Town, South Africa. He had just wrapped up an intense six-day, six-city U.S. tour to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the *Nakba*. *Nakba* means catastrophe in Arabic. It refers to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948.

Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela is a member of the South African parliament and chief of the Mvezo Traditional Council. His tour was sponsored by the U.S. Palestinian Community Network and the National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression, a national group that organizes action against unjust treatment of individuals because of race or political beliefs. He visited Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Orange County, San Francisco, and Chicago. Local activists

and progressive organizations in each city also contributed to hosting events.

In a message to Islamic Horizons on the morning after his final event in Chicago, Mandela said, "We managed to achieve what we set out to, linking up with the historical anti-apartheid movement, growing international solidarity and meeting with progressive partners. I want to thank the sponsors, USPCN and NAARPR, who have done well. The work of building a strong international solidarity network is an arduous task and cannot be accomplished overnight. It is evident, though, that you have put in much effort over the years and built sound relations across many sectors of society."

USPCN National Chair Hatem Abudayyeh called it an incredibly successful tour. He shared the goals that were set and met:

- Getting him in front of not only Palestinians and Arabs, but also Black

people, Chicanos/Latinos, other oppressed and working-class communities and other historical allies like labor rights, immigrant rights, anti-war/anti-U.S. intervention forces, etc.;

- Describing to individuals and organizations that had supported the anti-Apartheid movement, South Africans, and his grandfather why they should support Palestinians and the Palestine liberation movement;

- Projecting the politics of anti-settler colonialism, anti-racism, anti-Israeli apartheid

anti-imperialism (especially U.S. imperialism) and anti-Zionism; and

- Introducing his progressive, leftist, militant politics to audiences who maybe never even knew that Nelson Mandela's grandson was an activist member of the South African parliament.

INVITING MANDELA TO MARK THE NAKBA IN THE U.S.

A few months ago, Ashley Hudson, founder of Madison for Palestine, contacted Abudayyeh to propose USPCN invite Mandela to the U.S. in honor of the *Nakba*. Madison for Palestine had developed a connection with Mandela through social media and a Zoom meeting.

"I said, 'Hey, this is a long shot, but what do you think about USPCN officially inviting him?'" Hudson recalled.

Meanwhile, Hudson, also a USPCN member, who had a remote relationship with a great Palestine support/solidarity organization in South Africa and spoke with a leading member of Africa4Palestine about the possibility," Abudayyeh said.

The connection coincided with a viral video of Mandela's speech in Algeria. Abudayyeh believed that even if people didn't know much about Mandela previously, everyone fell in love with his chant of 'free, free Palestine ... from the river to the sea.' He did some research and realized Mandela's political views are very similar

to those of Palestinians — anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-Zionist, and anti-apartheid.

Abudayyeh sent an email to Mandela who responded, “Yeah, I’d love to do this.”

“Scheduling was very difficult because Chief Mandela is a very busy MP,” Abudayyeh explained after the tour. “When we had some problems reaching him in a timely manner while he was still in South Africa, I found a

without the freedom of Palestinians.” He called for supporters of Palestinians in the U.S. to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and lobby for “an end to U.S. aid to apartheid Israel.”

Having visited occupied Palestine himself in 2017, Mandela told a Milwaukee audience “the apartheid in Palestine is worse than anything we experienced (in South Africa).

Much like his grandfather, Mandela’s charisma and passion for the Palestinian struggle is drawing attention from those familiar with the *Nakba* as well as those who are just learning about it.

phone number on a press release from the House of Mandela and just took a chance by calling it. It was his personal cell phone number. He stayed on the phone with me patiently for over half an hour, listening to USPCN’s proposal regarding the tour. He didn’t send me to an assistant, a scheduler, a communications staffer or anyone else. He talked to me directly. We made plans and then I put our agreement on paper for his office to approve.

“It was incredibly easy because he has no pretensions, no arrogance. He is a brilliant, kind-hearted, political heavyweight who engaged with me and with everyone he met in Chicago with humility, care, and love. And I heard the same from people in other cities as well.”

A WHIRLWIND TOUR

Mandela flew from Cape Town just in time to make it to a Milwaukee dinner engagement on the anniversary of the *Nakba*, May 15. Three hours later, he was speaking there at an event that lasted until 10 p.m. The next morning, he was on to the next stop.

Some nights, Mandela had virtual meetings in Cape Town, fulfilling his responsibilities as a parliamentarian, said Hudson, who was part of a small group touring with him.

At every stop, Mandela repeated the message his grandfather delivered in a 1997 speech reaffirming his support of the Palestinians: “Our freedom is incomplete

“This day marks our call to end the occupation of historic Palestine. It marks our call for justice for the 750,000 Palestinians displaced as refugees. It marks our call to remember and tell the stories of the 15,000 Palestinians massacred and the 530 villages destroyed from 1947 to 1948 in occupied Palestine. These atrocities, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing continue unabated to this day.”

Before his speech in Minneapolis, Mandela met with George Floyd’s aunt and other local Black liberation activists in George Floyd Square. This was where Floyd was murdered in 2020 by a white police officer. He highlighted the similar experiences of Black Americans and Palestinians. “We demand justice for George Floyd just as we demand justice for the 185 victims of police racism and brutality in the USA that were brutally killed before him,” he declared. “We demand justice for the 37 Palestinians killed in Gaza over the last 10 days.”

Mandela was originally to speak at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. However, the day before, the campus event was canceled, allegedly due to an anonymous threat of violence posted on social media. CAIR-MN, the local event host, held the event at its offices in Minneapolis.

Abudayyeh recalled “a number of memorable moments” during Mandela’s visit to Chicago. “Because Chicago is home to

some of the top national leaders from the anti-Apartheid movement decades ago, those people attended a private reception for sponsors and community leaders. It was beautiful how they engaged with him, asking personal questions about his family, recalling visits to South Africa, and chanting anti-Apartheid and South African liberation slogans in Xhosa and Zulu.


“His engagement with youth, elders, and people from all different nationalities, was most memorable. I had to be the bad guy and interrupt many times so that everyone got a chance to shake his hand, take pictures and chat for a few seconds. He wouldn’t interrupt anyone or prematurely end any of those conversations himself.”

LASTING IMPACT

Most impactful was Mandela’s message, Abudayyeh said. “It is powerful — and very important — for marginalized communities and others to hear such an iconic voice from such an iconic family tell the story of Palestine and compare it to South Africa as astutely as he does. He truly loves the Palestinian people and supports our liberation.

“He said on many occasions in the two days that he was in Chicago that so many leading figures in South Africa — from Desmond Tutu to his grandfather to other important anti-Apartheid fighters — consider Israeli apartheid to be even more brutal than South African Apartheid ever was.”

Much like his grandfather, Mandela’s charisma and passion for the Palestinian struggle is drawing attention from those familiar with the *Nakba* as well as those who are just learning about it. Former Wisconsin Democratic legislator Sandy Pasch and a member of Jewish Voices for Peace Action, JVP’s political arm, said, “The fact I didn’t know about it for much of my life is a shame.” She attended Mandela’s Milwaukee talk because she wants to learn about and bear witness to the ongoing *Nakba*.”

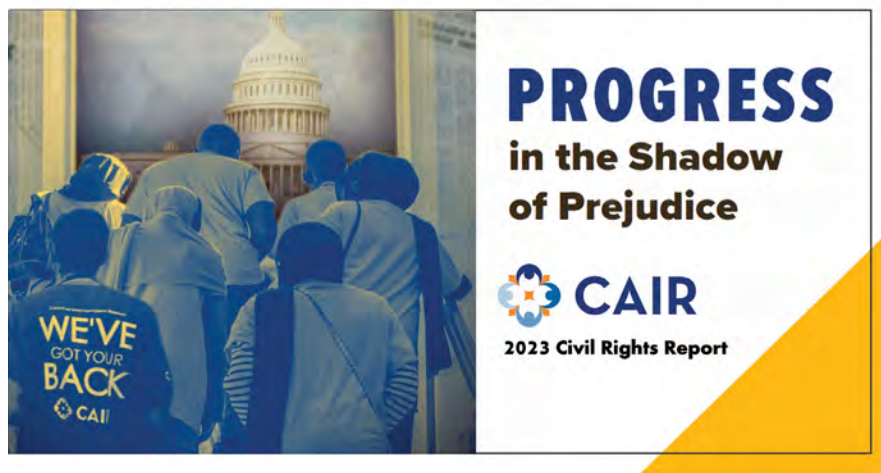
Reflecting on the tour, Hudson said, “This tour is important because it will be in the history books for generations to come. Long after we’re gone, those who fight for liberation can look back and know that support for the liberation of Palestine is more significant and widespread than we’re made to believe.” 

Sandra Whitehead, an author, educator and journalist based in Milwaukee, is the lead reporter for the Wisconsin Muslim Journal.

Progress in the Shadow of Prejudice

CAIR reports first decline in number of complaints since 1995

BY COREY SAYLOR AND AMMAR ANSARI



THERE IS A GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR Muslim Americans today. The Council on American-Islamic Relations' (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy group, latest report details a decline in complaints received by the organization in 2022. Titled "Progress in the Shadow of Prejudice," the report represents the first drop in total incoming complaints since CAIR started producing the annual review in 1995.

CAIR received 5,156 complaints nationwide in 2022, a 23% decrease when compared to the previous year. This is the sharpest single year change since the 32% increase that CAIR reported in 2017, the first year of Donald Trump's presidency.

Immigration and asylum cases topped the types of complaints with 1,207 cases. While Trump's Muslim and Africa bans were generally unwound at the start of the Biden presidency, many family tragedies and legal battles emerging from those discriminatory policies continue. At the same time, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 also continues to drive these types of cases.

CAIR finds a couple of factors are contributing to the overall decline in reported complaints. First, domestic politics in 2022 were less volatile than the preceding years. Less social unrest may have contributed to a reduction in the number of complaints.

Second, complaints about law enforcement and government overreach dropped

by 38%. Until the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol white supremacists and anti-government groups enjoyed political cover. Republican-driven political correctness ensured that government analysts understood that focusing on threats unrelated to Al-Qaeda, ISIS or their ideological allies had negative career implications. Since the Capitol attack, federal assets appear to have shifted to threats from the far-right instead of anti-Muslim fishing expeditions. The drop in complaints about law enforcement and government overreach could reflect this change.

Employment discrimination (563 complaints), incarcerated rights (310 complaints), and education discrimination (171 complaints) rounded out the top complaint types.

The education discrimination category, which saw a 63% increase in incoming complaints, raises concern. The incidents range from bullying to Islamophobic classroom content to schools failing to accommodate requests for Eid or Ramadan accommodations. The jump in cases may be in part related to a return of in-person instruction. Noted Islamophobia researcher Dr. Hatem Bazian, chair and founder, University of California Berkeley's Center for Race & Gender's Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project suggests that it might reflect a broader trend as educational settings are increasingly a key feature in America's recent culture wars.

Behind these numbers is always the human experience of being subjected to bias.

The report details examples of the effects of Islamophobia on the lived experiences of Muslim Americans and our efforts to secure justice for them.

In one instance a Muslim woman alleges that McDonald's employees intentionally put large amount of bacon on a Fish-o-Filet sandwich she ordered. After seeing the sandwich one of her children asked her if "they hate us." Another case involved a violent attack targeting an Afghan Muslim student. She was allegedly locked inside a bathroom by a school employee while other students beat her, forcibly removed her hijab, and attempted to choke her with it. The employee is reported to have since been terminated from the school system.

The report also details key legal and advocacy accomplishments during 2022.

For example, one section highlights CAIR Legal Defense Fund's work upholding free speech protections for supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement.

On October 13, 2021, executive vice president Rasmy Hassouna was astonished to see a loyalty oath to a foreign country slipped into the latest agreement between his company — A&R Engineering — and the City of Houston. A&R Engineering had done more than \$2 million of business with Houston over the last 20 years. CAIR Legal Defense Fund litigated Hassouna's case up to the U.S. Court of Appeals, resulting in an injunction blocking Texas from enforcing the anti-boycott law against Hassouna. CAIR's client will be able to continue his contract with Houston without abandoning his First Amendment right to boycott Israel.

The report also shares new developments in the Banking While Muslim phenomenon. For years, community members and non-profit organizations have reported to CAIR and other organizations that their bank accounts had been closed without explanation or that certain transactions, such as donations to Muslim charities, were flagged by their bank as problematic.

CAIR praised the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) Action, a group

Mark “Issa” David Smith

1953-2023

advocating for Iranian Americans, for its 2022 memo dedicated to ending the phenomenon. NIAC described the problem this way: “U.S. sanctions and extensive federal regulations like the Patriot Act encourage discrimination from banks.” NIAC adds, “the Patriot Act imposes a broad mandate that many banks appear to judge as only enforceable through national origin or heritage discrimination.” Twenty-two U.S. lawmakers, led by U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), wrote to the Biden administration in 2022 asked that the problem be fixed.

The report also describes some of CAIR’s work ensuring freedom of faith for Muslim inmates. In 2022, CAIR received complaints from incarcerated Muslims at prisons and jails in Georgia and California alleging that their respective institutions failed to provide timely Ramadan meals, forcing inmates to choose between not eating or violating their religious duty to fast. In Nevada, a prison created an issue with fulfilling a religious obligation to pray. CAIR has led initiatives to ensure that Muslim incarcerated practice their faith.

These are not the only big issues Muslim Americans confronted in 2022. The government continues its gymnastics to avoid supporting its own watch listing designations. We challenged the secret harvesting of the location data of Muslims from apps on their mobile devices. There were key revelations surrounding an anti-Muslim hate group paying for spies in U.S. Muslim institutions. In a positive development, we also detail how in 2022, Ohio and Maryland enshrined Muslim women’s sports inclusion into law, offering a legislative template for other state legislators to follow.

With this in mind, we offer recommendations. We believe that the U.S. government should tie police funding to submission of hate crimes data. We assert that banks should end the wrongful targeting of American Muslim, Arab, and Persian families. We think that states should follow the lead of Illinois, Ohio and Maryland by enshrining religious sports attire inclusion in law. We also continue to urge the Department of Justice to investigate the anti-Muslim hate group that paid informants to spy on U.S Muslim institutions.

The election of 189 elected officials who identify as Muslim across 30 states to public office during the 2022 midterm is a welcome sign of Muslim Americans’ expanding ability to guarantee equal social opportunities and equal protection under the law, both for themselves and others.

At the same time, 2022 offered plentiful evidence that even without high-profile politicians vilifying Muslims for personal political gain, the characteristic of being Muslim continues to function as a prejudice magnet.

One year of declining cases is not a problem solved. It is a glimmer of hope. Securing future declines has never been more urgent. Expanded protections for all those confronted by bigotry requires that we all double down our efforts to advocate, legislate, and litigate to secure progress against prejudice. **ib**

Ammar Ansari is CAIR’s research and advocacy coordinator. Corey Saylor is CAIR’s research and advocacy director. Progress in the Shadow of Prejudice is available for download on www.cair.com.

MARK “ISSA” DAVID Smith, a social activist, passed away on May 22 in Northern Virginia.

Imam Saffet Catovic, director of UN Operations for Justice For All, recalls, “I had the honor to know and work closely with him on the Bosnian struggle in the early 1990s (and before this in other justice work).

He was a longtime community activist, organizer, and a pillar of the Muslim community in the Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia area. Issa advocated for and provided assistance to Muslims in need all over the world through organizations like the Bosnia Task Force and Americans for Soviet Muslim Rights. In 1983 he wrote about the case of the imprisonment of Bosnian Muslim leaders in then-Communist Yugoslavia including, possibly, the first mention of Ali Izetbegovic and Mladi Muslimani (Young Muslims), the Islamic movement in Bosnia.

Izetbegovic would become the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990 and the founding father of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Issa was also involved in the American Muslim press and the American Muslim Council.

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, then secretary general of the Institute of Islamic Thought, recalls that when he came back after a long trip to the Soviet Union and established ASMR, he was looking for someone to lead it. He found Issa to be the only one who had taken courses on Central Asian Muslims. He took the responsibility and started the ASMR Newsletter. This is the only organization that had to fold after a few years because of the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of independent Muslim republics.

Issa was a member of the



ADAMS community since 1987. His involvement included serving as an *amir* and *khateeb* in the community as well as a Sunday School teacher.

CAIR executive director Nihad Awad said, “Issa was a pioneer of activism in the Muslim American community and will be fondly remembered for his humor, his hard work, and his defense of human rights in this nation and worldwide.”

Issa was a prominent advocate for helping refugees of Bosnia and Kosovo, as Washington, D.C. coordinator of the Bosnia Task Force which later became Justice For All (www.justiceforall.org).

He spent many years in support of Imam Jamil Al Amin and was a member of leadership of the National Community of Imam Jamil Al- Amin. He was also a strong supporter of African American and Native American causes.

His career also included years working as a geospatial analyst.

His wife Khadija, his children Tazkiya, Tauhid, and Taslim as well as his grandchildren, Myiesha, Mujahid, Zayna Lyn, Majeed, Layton, Emmeline, and Amira, and siblings Craig, Scott, and Lisa survive him. **ib**

Birthplace of the Apple

Commercial apple orchards causing a natural crossing of cultivated and wild apples, threaten Eastern Kazakhstan's centuries-old natural fruit

BY FAWZIA MAI TUNG

“THE REAL GARDEN OF Eden (is) located in the Kazakh mountains,” said Philip Forsline, horticulturist at Cornell University. To taste and learn more about these wild forests of Sievers apples, Islamic Horizons traveled to their birthplace in southeastern Kazakhstan.

For thousands of years, immense stands of wild apple forests covered the Tian Shan mountain slopes around the city of Almaty. The forests stretched from the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan all the way northward to the foothills of the Dzungar Alatau. Today, only 1% retain Sievers apple forests.

This apple was named by its “discoverer,” Johann August Carl Sievers, a German pharmacist and botanist who in 1790 joined a Russian expedition to the southern mountains of Siberia. Sievers became the first botanist to have ever reached the Tabargatai Mountains. He gave his name to the wild variety of apple he found there.

Soviet scientist and geneticist Nikolai Vavilov postulated that a cultivated plant's origin was in an area where the plant's wild relatives displayed the most adaptiveness and genetic variety. In 1929, he came upon these extensive wild apple forests. However, it was his student, Dr. Aimak Dzangaliev, a Kazakh conservationist, who dedicated his life to the study of modern apples. He proved genetically that indeed, this area of Kazakhstan was the original source of the apple.

Beautiful Almaty, southeastern Kazakhstan's largest city, is



PHOTO: © FAWZIA MAI TUNG

nestled at the foot of the tall snowy peaks of the Tian Shan mountains. Before the country's capital was moved 25 years ago to Astana, Almaty was the political and cultural capital of the world's ninth largest country. Its name is derived from “Alma Ata” — grandfather of apples — for the slopes around it used to be covered with wild apple forests. However, in the 19th and 20th centuries, millions of apple trees, as well as the symbiotic eglantine and barberry shrubs that protected them from predators, were cut down to make way for pastureland and urban development. Around 70% of the wild apple forests in that region have

been lost since the 1960s. In 2010, to help preserve the remaining wild apple forests, the Kazakh government created the Dzungar Alatau National Park.

To explore this park, I arranged for a four-wheel drive, its driver, a translator, and a mountain ranger. Shopping for some groceries before setting off, I was stunned to find large red apples being sold as “American apples,” in the cradle of apple trees! These certainly did not look American in the sense that they were not washed, scrubbed, waxed, and polished. They looked quite “natural” with that whitish “bloom” or waxy coat secreted by the apple's skin that

meant they were just picked off the branch.

We drove for a few hours, stopping only for a picnic lunch. The highway gave way to an unpaved road. We rode, rather tumbled along, like laundry in a washer on the “heavy” setting. I hung desperately onto the handle above the window, trying to avoid hitting my head too much. The necessity of a ranger's knowledge of the area became obvious when I realized that not only were we driving on what looked like invisible trails, but we also had to cross several creeks, before reaching the base camp guesthouse.

Next morning, as my companions busied themselves cooking breakfast, I wandered outside and spotted my first apple tree, near the outhouse. The fruit were small and yellow. They were a little bitter and sour — wild apples indeed. We hiked up to Lake Zhaysylkol, a stunning turquoise body of water formed by an earthquake several millennia ago.

The next day, I was over the moon. As we ascended beyond the poplars, and before reaching the spruces, we walked on trails of brown apple carpets, breathing in a sweet scent of cider-like apple juice. Everywhere on the slopes were apple trees, but also apricots, barberries, currants, and cherries, all happily growing among wild herbs and shrubs. Some trees had their bark scored horizontally so abundantly I thought they were some types of birch. Aida explained they were hand scored by sap collectors. “What do you do with the sap?”

I asked ignorantly. “You drink it, like in Canada,” smiled Aida.

The lovely September sunshine allowed me to keep on clicking photos, for the views of mountains in the distance were absolutely superb. We did not meet anyone at all on the trail since this park is remote and primitive enough to discourage incidental tourists.

Eventually, we reached our destination, a little clearing with a picnic table, next to a wide and



PHOTO © FAWZIA MAI TUNG

of the invigorating apple-scented mountain air.

The next morning, we packed up and started the rollercoaster drive back to the highway. We stopped under a single tree by a river for a picnic. I drank its crystal-clear water, and even refilled my water bottle with it, and did not feel any discomfort afterwards. A man in army fatigues on horseback stopped by and talked to the ranger. “What did he want?” I inquired. Aida said

Before the country’s capital was moved 25 years ago to Astana, Almaty was the political and cultural capital of the world’s ninth largest country. Its name is derived from “Alma Ata” — grandfather of apples — for the slopes around it used to be covered with wild apple forests.

gnarled tree. This, I was told, is the world’s oldest apple tree, estimated to be four hundred years old. This place was perfect for a little picnic. We had not brought any food with us, so we sipped from our water bottles, and snacked on the apples we’d collected on the way. The mountain ranges stretched in the distance, and we inhaled the sweet scent of apples permeating the air.

Downslope, we stopped at a location where I’d spotted a grove of apple trees on the way up. The ranger gallantly cut us a path through the six-foot tall dry grass. Quite a number of trees stood there, each displaying fruit of varying colors and sizes. The men helped shake the branches so apples would fall off. We picked as many as we could. I asked Aida to record me while I carried out a taste test for the different varieties of apples.

Some were as large as my open palm, others more the size of cherries. Some apples were a deep pinkish red, while others were yellow. Most had

blemishes, definitely not marketable on account of their imperfect looks, but this did not detract from their taste. Some were tangy, others even slightly bitter. Most were quite sweet, each with a different flavor. Many were crunchy and juicy, while few were either dry or cottony. My favorite apple was around 1.5 inches in diameter, yellowish pink, very crunchy, juicy, and sweet. It took me a while to figure out the flavor. I can only describe it as somewhere between an apricot and a rose. It is amazing how many different colors, sizes, textures, and flavors of fruits are produced by cross pollination.

With our bags and pockets full of apples, we rode back to the guesthouse to find two other vehicles parked. Apparently, this was the first time ever that this situation had arisen. There were too many tourists and not enough beds. My travel companions were not trained cooks, but everything they made tasted wonderful. It could be because

he was just checking our papers. I pondered a while on the convenience of having passport control ride up to you versus waiting in line in front of a booth. After brunch, we drove on across more creeks, and eventually reached the highway. The ranger parted ways and we managed to reach Almaty in the afternoon.

Now that I had a harvest of Sievers in my bag, I set off in search of the Aport apple. They are yellowish green, with blushes of all shades of red. They are rather large in size and weigh around half a pound, the largest looking like small melons. Introduced to Kazakhstan in 1865 by Yegor Redko, a Russian, it was crossed with the Sievers, resulting in this unique huge apple with a delicate aroma. One of its characteristics is its long shelf life. An apple picked in September can easily stay fresh until January or February. During the Soviet era, Aport apples were delicacies shipped all the way to Moscow to delight government VIPs.

Once numbering over three million, the Aport apple trees around Almaty have now been mostly razed to make way for urban development. Interest in Aport apples has declined, as has cultivation. Isolated groups of Aport apple trees can be found within a couple of hours’ drive from town, around Lake Issyk and up the slopes towards the Turgen Waterfalls.

Today’s apple scientists and researchers have been traveling to this southeastern corner of Kazakhstan to collect specimens to add to their stock of genetic material. Wild apple trees born of natural selection show extremely strong resistance to many diseases such as blue mold, apple scab, fire blight, cedar apple rust, apple maggots, and apple leaf curling midges. Thus, they are used for breeding and improving today’s commercial apple varieties. Another unique ability of the Sievers apple is its use in the development of a red-fleshed apple with high anthocyanin content which is beneficial in its ability to prevent cardiovascular diseases and protect against liver damage.

A new development is worrying the nearly 100-year-old Dr. Dzangaliev. He is the same 15-year-old who led Vasilov on his legendary exploration of this area. The growing number of commercial apple orchards is now causing a natural crossing of cultivated and wild apples, and the high number of cultivated trees is now swamping the wild remnants.

Despite the establishment of the Dzungar Alatau National Park, the *Malus sieversii* remains listed as “Vulnerable” on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species. **ib**

Dr. Fawzia Mai Tung is executive director of Tung Education Resources; leader of Equity and Inclusion Team, the Society of Children’s Books Writers and Illustrators Arizona Chapter (SCBWI-AZ). She is also the secretary of the executive board and translation team consultant, Dimash USA Fan Club.

Healthy and Tayyab Eating in the Era of Ultra-Processed Foods

Learning to read labels

BY MUHAMMAD ABDULLAH



DID YOU KNOW “HOMEMADE” sandwiches, “organic” granolas, and “plant-based” milks have up to 40 ingredients? An April 2023 report in the U.K. Daily Mail states “ultra-processed” foods make up more than 70% of the U.S. food supply. A national survey suggests that 1 in 8 U.S. adults are addicted to these foods. America’s obsession with ultra-processed foods, some of which have up to 100 ingredients, have been linked to heart disease, dementia, and cancer. They could be fueling a growing wave of chronic diseases.

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS ARE CHEAP AND DELICIOUS

Ultra-processed foods are higher in salt, sugar, and fat, and contain ingredients you would not add when cooking at home (such as coloring, sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup, preservatives, hydrolyzed proteins, hydrogenated oils, and monosodium glutamate etc.). Common examples of ultra-processed food include sugary beverages; chips and cookies, fast food, reconstituted meat products such as hot dogs and fish sticks, pizza and TV dinners, energy and protein

bars and shakes, ice cream, sweetened yogurt, and plant-based milks.

The American Medical Association states that ultra-processed foods are industrial creations made with little — if any — whole foods that often contain large amounts of added sugars and salt and infused with artificial colors and additives. They are cheap, convenient, and tasty.

The use of additives has become more common these days due to the increase in demand for processed products at an affordable price. In meat processing, certain animal tissues such as meat trimmings, bone scraps, or certain internal organs such as intestines, which are usually not sold in fresh meat marketing, are integrated into the food chain as valuable protein-rich ingredients. Animal gelatin that acts as a cohesive agent to meat mixes is used to make the cooked products solid, elastic, and easy to slice. Added water containing phosphates and dextrose is used to make the meat more succulent.

According to CBS News, there are more than 10,000 chemicals and additives allowed in food in the U.S., often in small amounts. But many haven’t been evaluated by the FDA

in decades. What we consume becomes a part of the body, and can affect us physically as well as spiritually.

The Prophet (*salla Allahu alaihi wa sallam*) advised: “The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is enough for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls to straighten his back, but if he must (fill his stomach), then one third for his food, one third for his drink, and one third for his breath.” (reported Al-Miqdām ibn Ma’di Karib; Ibn Maajah).

The two common factors leading people to consume higher amounts of ultra-processed foods are cost, and a lack of making healthy choices. A Huffington Post survey shows that people living in full-service grocery store areas where healthy nutritious foods were available still chose unhealthy foods. The convenience of ordering online is yet another factor.

To make it easier to understand, researchers have separated foods into four categories, based on the extent of processing, using the NOVA classification system. NOVA was designed by the Center for Epidemiological Studies in Health and Nutrition, School of Public Health, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

NOVA Group 1 consists of such foods as fresh vegetables, fruits, pasteurized milk, chicken, fish, beans, and eggs because these go through no or minimal processing before you buy them. In contrast, NOVA Group 4 (ultra-processed), contains little, if any, of the foods or ingredients from group 1, and often include unhealthy levels of added sugars, sodium, and fat. These ingredients make the food taste better, but too much of them leads to serious health issues like obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

HOW TO READ LABELS

The first thing about avoiding ultra-processed foods is to have some knowledge

about reading the ingredient list. The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA), requires all prepackaged products with more than one ingredient to list ingredients in descending order by weight. In this way the first ingredient listed is always present in the largest amount and can be useful when comparing products.

Experts advise to avoid the products with more than five ingredients and to cook from scratch at home as often as possible. When people eat sweet foods, high in caloric value, pleasure hormones like dopamine are released in their brains and they feel better.

The nutrition label shows key nutrients that may impact your health. For example, Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a painful gastrointestinal-tract disease linked with consumption of diets with higher amounts of sugar and fat. Celiac, an autoimmune disease, damages the small intestine whenever gluten is consumed. Consumers should use these labels to meet their personal dietary needs.

The size of the ingredient list is a key as to whether the food is ultra-processed or not. For instance, corn is minimally processed. Canned corn is processed, and a corn chip is ultra-processed. Ditto for an apple, apple juice, and apple pie. Milk, reduced fat milk, and unsweetened almond milk.

EATING HEALTHY AND TAYYAB FOODS

Verse 7:157 of the Qur'an, states that for us to consume a thing it must not only be halal, but also be *tayyab* (pure). In this verse, *tayyab* is contrasted against the Arabic word "*Al-Khaba'ith*", which is translated as "evil." This could mean anything not *tayyab* is impure, disgusting and harmful. Islam emphasizes food safety and frequently associates halal with *tayyab*.

"O ye who believe! Eat of the clean and pure that We have provided for you, and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him ye worship" (Quran 2: 172).

The "USDA Inspected & Passed" stamp on commercially produced meat and poultry products serves to put the consumers at ease that these products are safe, wholesome, properly labeled and are produced in a sanitary environment. The first thing that the USDA inspectors do in a plant is to perform a sanitation inspection. In case of halal meat, each animal carcass receives the halal logo after the animal has received the "USDA Inspected & Passed" stamp.

USDA also provides grading services. There are eight grades for beef, based on the

age of the animal and its marbling — prime, choice, select, standard, commercial, utility, cutter, and canner. Prime being the highest quality and canner the lowest. Chicken may similarly be marked as Grade A, B, or C. Meat inspection and meat grading are two different things. Meat inspection is performed to determine the meat's fitness for human consumption and this service is paid for by the government. Whereas, the grading is about the quality and yield of meat, and the plants pay the USDA for this service. For this reason, not all meats are graded.

There are more than 10,000 chemicals and additives allowed in food in the U.S., often in small amounts. But many haven't been evaluated by the FDA in decades.

The USDA does not get involved in "Halal" meat certification. Instead, the plant contracts services to a halal certification organization. Thus, it becomes the certification organization's responsibility whose "Halal" stamp is on the product.

The global meat industry is very complex. All animal raw edible parts are sourced from slaughter and processing plants around the world and are used to produce different types of processed products. It provides many opportunities to engage in substitution, mislabeling, and other types of food fraud. For example, a researcher at the University of Guelph (Ontario) found mislabeling and cross contamination in 20% of sausage samples.

CAUTION WITH SOME LABELS

Food labels are supposed to allow consumers to make more informed decisions by knowing the quality or standards in the production of meat. However, some labels can be vague and confusing. For example, claims that a brand of chicken has no steroids or hormones can give the impression to a consumer that it is because of this company's special efforts. The fact is that steroids and hormones are not allowed in any U.S. poultry or hog production.


"Chemical Free" is another term that is disallowed to be used on a label. The reason could be that some chemicals are naturally occurring and there is no way to assure that

products are free of any chemical substance. "Humanely raised" or "sustainably farmed" is, yet another such term for which there are no regulatory standards. However, some labels do tell how the animal was raised, what it ate, if any chemicals were added to its feed, etc. and can be helpful towards healthy and *tayyab* eating.

"Naturally Raised" labels indicate that no growth hormones, no antibiotics, and no animal by-products were fed. "Grass Fed" label indicates that only grass and forage was fed for the lifetime of the animal. The

only exception is the milk consumed prior to the animal's weaning. "USDA Organic" label indicates that the animals were fed an organic grain or forage diet, no animal by-products, no use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, products were kept separate from non-organic products, and documentation was maintained for traceability.

Conventional meat, with the above labels, have been in the supermarket for decades but not the halal meat. It is unclear why. Consumers expect the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to do something in this matter. OIC recently published its 10-year plan that aims for uniformity in standardization and accreditation activities, after its 5-year strategic plan (2016-2020) could not succeed. Hopefully, OIC should be able to resolve this issue while it continues with its 10-year plan.

The above mentioned labels may have some deficiencies and need better enforcement (How Organic is "Organic" Food – Islamic Horizons - Nov/Dec 2022). However, they are defined by USDA and other government agencies, and based on what these labels claim, this is the closest one can get to healthy (nutrient-dense) and *tayyab* foods. 

Dr. Mohammad Abdullah retired after serving 29 years with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, the agency that regulates the meat industry. He is also the author of "A Closer Look at Halal Meat from Farm to Fork" (2016).

Global Hunger and Food Waste

ISNA GREEN INITIATIVE TEAM



THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOOD produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet. Yet as many as 828 million people still go hungry.

After steadily declining for a decade, world hunger is on the rise, affecting nearly 10% of people globally. From 2019 to 2022, the number of undernourished people grew by as many as 150 million, a crisis driven largely by conflict, climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Bank estimates that an additional 75 to 95 million people could be living in extreme poverty in 2022, compared to initial pre-pandemic projections.

An estimated 60% of the world's hungry live in countries experiencing active conflict, mostly caused by disputes over food, water, or the resources needed to produce them. Conflict disrupts harvests, hampers the delivery of humanitarian aid, and forces families to flee their homes.

Climate change has a dramatic impact on the quantity and nutritious quality of

food produced around the world. Drought, floods, fires, heatwaves, and other climate shocks are also forcing out people from their localities, destroying livelihoods, and pushing communities deeper into hunger.

In 2022, the war in Ukraine has made conditions worse. Restricted global food supplies drive up prices, and threaten the world's most vulnerable people and countries. More than 48 million people are facing emergency levels of hunger, with the threat of acute malnutrition, starvation, and death, according to the World Food Program (WFP). According to the report of the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC), about 193 million people in 53 countries/territories experienced acute food insecurity at crisis levels or worse in 2021.

Over 45 million children are affected by the most visible, severe, and potentially life-threatening form of acute malnutrition. Globally, 1 in 5 deaths among children under 5 is attributed to severe malnutrition

resulting in the death of more than 1 million each year.

GLOBAL FOOD WASTE

The UN Environment Program (UNEP) and partner organization WRAP, Food Waste Index Report 2021 estimates that food waste from households, retail establishments and the food service industry totals 931 million tons each year. Nearly 570 million tons of this waste occurs at the household level. The report also reveals that the global average of 74 kg per capita of food wasted each year is remarkably similar from lower-middle income to high-income countries.

Nearly half of all fruits and vegetables produced globally are wasted and nearly 1/3 of all food produced globally is lost or wasted annually. This costs the global economy around \$940 billion annually.

Food waste isn't only what consumers scrape off their plate or leave to rot in their refrigerator. Global food waste begins from



The U.S. discards more food than any other country in the world, nearly 40 million tons or 30% of all food worth \$48.3 billion is thrown away each year.

agricultural production and continues to the landfill. At the farm, the waste can be driven by a whole host of factors beyond the grower's control. Weather, pests, disease, low market prices or high labor costs all lead to food left in the field. Food that may look perfectly ripe and edible in the field may be too ripe by the time it reaches the consumer, so it's never harvested.

The U.S. discards more food than any other country in the world, nearly 40 million tons or 30% of all food worth \$48.3 billion is thrown away each year. It is estimated that about half of the water used to produce this food also goes to waste since agriculture is the largest human use of water. China and India produce more household food waste than any other country at an estimated 92 million and 69 million metric tons every year, respectively. This is unsurprising, considering both countries have by far the largest populations globally.

In the U.S. and other developed countries, grocery stores, restaurants, and consumers are all responsible for most of the food waste. Grocery stores contribute to food waste by encouraging consumers to buy more than they need, overstocking shelves,

and inaccurately predicting shelf life of damaging products. Even slightly blemished food items are taken off the shelf as they know customers want perfect looking produce.

"It's not that easy to solve this complicated problem," said Ned Spang, assistant professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology at the University of California, Davis. Spang led a team of researchers examining global food loss and waste. The comprehensive review finds that there are larger systemic factors that drive food waste. The study points to the need to look at structural, cultural and social factors rather than only focusing on actions by individual producers and consumers. It's not just consumers that are picky about their produce.

Market-based quality or grade standards also play an unintentional role in food waste. "A lot of the criteria are based on the appearance of the product and may not have anything to do with eating quality or utility of the product," said Elizabeth Mitcham, a postharvest extension specialist and director of the Horticulture Innovation Lab at UC Davis.


Losses after harvest are most pronounced in less-developed countries, where an

estimated 30 percent of food is wasted. In tropical countries where humidity is an issue, food can rot or mold quickly if not dried properly or cooled. Growers and distributors often can't afford the energy costs of drying, adequate storage or refrigerated transportation. Inadequate road infrastructure can also lead to higher levels of spoilage.

In the Quran, God has at many places warned us against waste:

"...But waste not by excess: for Almighty God loves not the wasters." (Quran 6:141).

Therefore, it is our responsibility to not only avoid waste but create awareness against waste. We need to urge governments and society to adopt policies which result in reducing waste from the farm level to consumption.

ISNA Green Initiative has always been promoting awareness against waste in food or other aspects of life. The Green Ramadan campaign is a constant reminder about food waste. Unfortunately, Muslims around the world waste more food in Ramadan than any other time of the year. The ISNA Green Initiative team urges individuals and communities to join us in raising their voice against systematic problems of food waste. Reduced global food waste means more food available to the hungry population of the world. 

ISNA Green Initiative Team Members: Huda Alkaff, Saffet Catovic, Nana Firman, Uzma Mirza, S. Masroor Shah (chair)

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The Decline of the Pursuit of Knowledge

Muslims once achieved the highest status in math, philosophy, and science

BY M. BASHEER AHMED

WHEN THE ISLAMIC MEDICAL Association of North America invited me to present a paper on “Muslim Physicians of Spain in the Medieval Era,” I studied the works of great Muslim philosophers and scientists who significantly contributed to world civilization. I realized that many Muslims, and those from other faiths, do not know of these monumental contributions during the so-called Dark Ages in Europe. Most Westerners assumed that the world had plunged into literary ignorance for more than a thousand years after the decline of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. They deliberately ignored documenting Muslim scientists’ contributions.

However, science and Islam go hand in hand. The Quran and Hadith inspire Muslims to learn. The first revealed verse, “Read! In the Name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen, has taught man that which he knew not” (96:1-5). The Quran has mentioned the human capacity to read, understand, and record observations for future use. With this intention, I founded the Institute of Medieval and Post-Medieval Studies in 2001. Our aim is to disseminate information about great medieval Muslim scholars and their contributions. I also edited the book “Muslim Contribution to World Civilization” (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005).

MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE

When Muslims conquered territories of the Byzantine Empire, they were amazed and fascinated by the new fields of study. Not only did they acquire new knowledge, but they also made great contributions to science, philosophy, and mathematics over eight centuries (7-15th). The Abbasid Caliphs,

who supported education, established the great institution Bait ul Hikmah (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad. This served as a center for translating books from Greek, Latin, Chinese, and Indian languages to Arabic. In the 8th century, it had the world’s most extensive library. The Abbasids attracted the best scientists, philosophers, and theologians, regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. This helped Baghdad become the center of knowledge, culture, and trade. In 751 H, 400 years before Europe, Muslims acquired papermaking technology from the Chinese, which helped scholars preserve their knowledge in books.

The great universities of Baghdad, Cordoba, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Uzbekistan attracted students from all over the world. These institutions promoted a vibrant intellectual curiosity and freedom of expression necessary for scientific inquiry and research. Among the thousands of scholars, some noted ones include physicist Al-Haytham, physicians Al-Razi and Ibn Sina, philosopher Ibn Rushd, traveler Ibn Battuta, mathematician Al-Khwarizmi, astronomers Ulugh Bey and Al-Tusi, surgeon Al-Zahrawi, and geographer Al-Masudi.

WHY THE DECLINE?

About ten years ago, I became curious why Muslims, who had reached the pinnacle of knowledge by the 11th century, were today at the lowest on the totem pole. This led to in-depth studies of the real reason for the downfall. Most articles and books have blamed the Mongol attack on Baghdad (1258 CE), which destroyed universities and killed many scholars. Many blamed colonialism as another significant reason.

Indeed, these were contributing factors, but the main reason was the theologians’ opposition to studying philosophy and science as they were concerned that it would weaken the faith. Another major factor was



that the Suljuk Caliphs, who took power from Abbasids, were convinced by their Grand Vizier Nizam-ul-Mulk (d. 1092 CE) that educated people would demand democracy and they would lose control. The caliphs withdrew their support of excellent universities, and Nizam-ul-Mulk changed the curriculum to Islamic studies (dars-e-Nizamiyya) in all the universities. This was seen as the first government sponsored education system in history. This served to strengthen the Sunni creed and to train the officials needed by the state.

Muslim fanatics destroyed laboratories and observatories. The great observatory in Samarkand built by Ulugh Beg was demolished in 1490, and in 1580, Sheikh al-Islam convinced the sultan to shut down the great observatory, which Taqi ad-Din had built in Istanbul in 1577.

The decline of the pursuit of knowledge started in the 11th century. By the 15th century, no university in the Muslim world was teaching science and philosophy, and published very little scientific work. The Ottoman Empire declined to use the printing press (invented in Germany in the 15th century) until the 17th century as it was declared haram by muftis.

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, Muslims still had great empires: Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal but succumbed to colonialism between the 17-18th century as they could not stop the European onslaught. Europeans transferred the Muslim scientists’ intellectual work by translating from Arabic to Latin and other European languages. They started advancing scientific, industrial, and economic development from the 15th century onwards, leaving Muslim countries far behind.

By the 20th century, Muslim countries gained independence from colonialism,



Muslim scientists and scholars of the Medieval era, inspired by Quranic verses, illuminated the world with knowledge during the dark ages of Europe.

but remained educationally backward and behind in industrial and scientific development. Many Asian countries which gained independence after the Muslim countries, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, have made significant scientific and industrial progress.

SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Electricity not only removes darkness, but is used in all aspects of life. The advances in transportation from bicycles to bullet trains and in communication from postal mail to instant messaging has revolutionized the world. Science has helped us combat many deadly diseases. Meteorologists can predict thunderstorms and tornadoes, saving thousands of human lives. Now, artificial intelligence is trying to make our lives easier.

Muslims have contributed to scientific discoveries, but not at the rate at which they could have if they didn't face the obstacles outlined above. Muslims have made insignificant scientific discoveries in the last five hundred years

1.7 billion Muslims living in 57 Muslim-majority countries constitute 25% of the world population. Yet, Muslims have only 1% of all scientists and 6% of scientific

publications. Muslims spend 0.5% of GDP on research and development vs. 10% of spending by Western countries. The literacy rate is 40% in Muslim countries vs. 90% in the Western world. The Muslim world has 500 scientists and technologies per million population vs. 5000 per million in Western countries.

The great Muslim scholars of the medieval years were the product of the educational and cultural environment at its peak in the Muslim world. They did not see any dichotomy between religion and science. Their motivation was to gain knowledge for the benefit of humanity.

The colonists reintroduced the subjects of science and technology in universities in Muslim countries. Despite resistance from Muslim scholars, few educators supported and promoted scientific education, such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (d. 1898) in India and Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) in Egypt. In the last 50 years, Muslim scientists, who received the Nobel Prize achieved this status by doing major research work in Western countries. Many emerging young scientists are doing most of their work in the West..

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Science and technology have provided humans with numerous comforts of life, and Muslims should focus on such research and critical thinking. Keeping the balance between worldly and spiritual aspects is the purpose of human creation, and Muslims must include strong moral and ethical values in the integrated education system.

The Quran states that believers have been sent for the betterment of humanity, that they will promote what is good, and prevent what is wrong (3:110). Carrying out rituals mechanically without any impact on personal life, family, and society is not fulfilling the fundamental purpose of worship in Islam. A hadith narrated by Abu Huraira


states, "Whoever relieves human's distress in this world, God will rescue them from the difficulties of the Hereafter" (Muslim). We can eradicate poverty through scientific education and industrial development. Zakat that is collected should be spent on education to eliminate poverty. In this way, people will eventually not need zakat.

THE NEED FOR FUTURE SCIENTISTS

IMPMS held an essay competition for middle and high school students to encourage them to become future scientists. They wrote essays on Muslim scholars and scientists of the medieval years, Muslim Nobel Laureates in science, and several leading Muslim scientists in Western countries. Their research shone in their excellent essays. They agreed that the competition motivated them to become scientists and innovators.

IMPMS has also joined hands with organizations like DiscoverSTEM (<https://discoverstem.info/>) which nurture students and foster critical thinking at an early age to create the next generation of intellectuals worldwide. DiscoverSTEM has been training students in innovative thinking and entrepreneurial mindset and solving real-life problems such as aerospace, power, energy, security, health, and environment. This creates an interest in STEM and using problem-solving skills to find innovative solutions for real-world issues.

Since the 11th century, philosophy as a discipline has declined among Muslims. We need to understand how religious injunctions were understood differently by philosophers in their time. This type of thriving intellectual environment is absent in our contemporary era. Some religious leaders threaten intellectuals, philosophers, and independent scholars. Islamic philosophy is needed to solve the Muslim social and educational crises.

God has given humans the best gift of intelligence for critical and rational thinking. They should use this for scientific discoveries to improve human conditions. It is part of worship. Islam needs a renewed scientific and philosophical vigor to bring about an Islamic Renaissance. After all, the Quran states, "God will never change our condition unless we first act to change ourselves" (13:11). 

Dr. Basheer Ahmed, a former professor of psychiatry at Southwestern Medical School, Dallas, is chairman emeritus at the Muslim Community Center for Human Services, Dallas, and president of the Institute of Medieval and posts Medieval studies, in North Texas.



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JUSTICE IN ISLAM – NEW ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

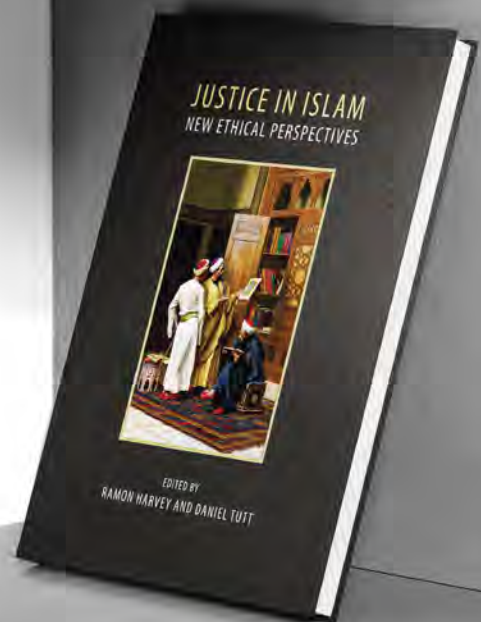
From its roots in the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to its branches in contemporary political and social movements, Islam has always been concerned with the question of social justice. The promise of a just order on earth has motivated both the reflections of the community of scholars and the actions of Muslims who have striven to realize it within their societies. This concise volume focuses on some of the ways that the theme of justice is explored in emerging currents of Islamic thought. Chapters discuss new theological and ethical proposals in the light of contemporary philosophical developments; ideas of gender justice that provoke a reformist challenge to the received tradition; and regional contexts, such as Turkey, Iran and Japan. The contributions to this collection raise the prospect that if justice can be imagined more perfectly as an Islamic ideal, perhaps it can be brought into reality.



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