



AMR News

CONVENTION'S ZEST OF YOUTH

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AMR News

AMR News is published every three months (God Willing). The articles published in *AMR News* do not necessarily reflect the views of AMR as a body. Contributions from Members of the Association and others are welcome and should be sent to The Editor, *AMR News* by October 15th 2006. See below for contact details.

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Mariam, Saira, Farah, Zaineb, Zohra, Zuhayr and Hasan were under 12s or, in some cases, even younger, when they first started coming to the AMR Reunions and Conventions. Now, teenagers, they have taken charge of running the 2006 Convention.

At a meeting held in a restaurant on the 27th May 2006, these and other youngsters, discussed their plans for the Convention, following weeks of research into new and exciting activities and discussions on how best to conduct the three day programme. In this endeavour, they have been supported and guided by Mohammed Dhalech, who oversees the Conventions and Reunions held by AMR.

Much of the work in terms of planning had been done prior to the meeting via the Email discussion group AMRREUNION set up by Mohammed to network the youngsters. During these deliberations, it was agreed by the young managers that the basic format of the residential should be retained as it had proved both enjoyable and successful.

One key innovation is the organising of a Syrian breakfast for the Sunday and in terms of activities, the highlight of the Convention will be GoApe, a high-adventure activity for older teenagers and adults. Much loved activities like Canoeing and Horse-riding have been retained and are already over-subscribed. Older teenagers have also decided to accept an opportunity to 'live rough' by putting into use an Anglo-Saxon hut in the grounds of The Wilderness Centre. Up to eight youngsters will be able camp in the hut - probably organised so that boys and girls alternately share a sleepover in the hut.

hard copy pic only

Mariam, Farah and Saira were initiated into the art of committee working as youngsters

WORD INTO ART EXHIBITION DEVELOPMENTS

The British Museum's *Word Into Art* Exhibition was launched on May 15th to much Media and popular acclaim. The Exhibition, which showcases contemporary Middle Eastern art, which has been inspired by the ***Qur'an*** and the Islamic techniques of calligraphy and geometric pattern.

It has been attracting many visitors.

The Exhibition has also been supported by talks and activities for children. In a note to the AMR-nominated consultant to the Exhibition and the other advisers, Emma Clarke of the British Museum says, "I would very much like to consider retaining you

all as a panel of Community advisers for Middle East provision and community development." The advisers will be expected to contribute to an e.forum and meet up twice a year as well as be available to contribute to discussions and raise and answer questions about future developments.

MCB AGM

Dr. Usama Hasan attended the MCB Annual General Meeting and Elections held on 4th June at the London Muslim Centre.

Dr. Muhammad Abdul Bari, who has been active with the East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre and has a background in education, was elected General Secretary.

DONATION HELPS DEVELOP PROJECTS

Thanks to a donation by a member who wishes to remain anonymous, AMR will be able to publish the long-awaited proceedings of the conference held in 2003 on Music Education and Muslims. The conference, which was addressed by Dr. Tariq Ramadan amongst others, is being finalised prior to publication.

The Conference

proceeding's publication, coincides with the publication of member Dr. Diana Harris's book '*Music Education and Muslims*' published by Trentham and reviewed here.

The donor's generous donation will also enable the organisation to develop the 'Horrid History' forum outcomes.

Cont. on p7/

AMR contributes to women's conversations event

The Tent at the St. Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation was packed with women eager to engage in conversation with Muslim women about issues of faith and gender at a meeting held on May 24th.

The idea for this conversation came from Justine Huxley, Inter-

faith Coordinator, who had been struck by the extent to which the perceived negative position of women in Islam created a barrier to listening to, nevermind appreciating, what Islam taught and had to say - an experience she had when a Muslim speaker who had spoken "beautifully" at a meeting

found himself confronted by hostile questioning on the treatment of women in Islam by an audience who couldn't see past these issues.

Sarah Sheriff of AMR assisted Justine in conducting the conversations which were organised so that two Muslim women were

Cont. on p7/

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ARE MUSLIMS BEGINNING TO GET A GRIP ON PROBLEMS?

Istanbul hosted an international two day conference of Muslims in Europe on the weekend of 2nd and 3rd July. Normally such jamborees are long on rhetoric but short on practicality - especially when there is Western government sponsorship alleged, however, this meeting may have been an exception to the rule. IslamOnline News reports that the worthies meeting in Istanbul (including several high profile Muslims from the UK, as well as famous scholars like Shaikh Yusuf al Qaradawi and Professor Tariq Ramadan) had decided to focus on finding the legislative grounds for a political **fiqh** (Islamic Jurisprudence) for the Muslim minorities in which many focal items would be extensively dealt. Of these issues were politics and religion, political participation of Muslims in Europe and **shura** (mutual consultation) and democracy. "We will do our best to come up with something concrete and tangible that may urge Muslims living in majority non-Muslim countries to take part and participate in the political life of their respective societies," Sheikh Husain Halawa, Secretary to the European Council of Fatwa Research, told IslamOnline.net. He said the scholars will seek to clarify the **Shari`ah**-based regulations that should be observed upon this political participation.

The 16th session of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) was also held in Istanbul and the cultural and social alienation of sections of the European Muslim communities was discussed. "Europe has become the homeland for Muslims who live therein after it had been regarded as their second home," Faisal Mawlawi, ECFR Deputy Chairman, told the opening session late Monday, July 3. "That's why they need a genuine sort of **fiqh** to regulate their lives in a stable and permanent manner."

Mawlawi said the Dublin-based ECFR, which aims to serve Muslims living in the West and facilitate their positive integration into society while preserving their Islamic identity, has passed the stage of issuing **fatwas** based on the necessity or the temporary needs of those people. "ECFR started to look for a genuine sort of **fiqh** that suits them and applies to their special cases and circumstances."

According to former *New Scientist* Opinion Editor, Ehsan Masood, writing in *Prospect* magazine, "In Britain and the US, we have seen the emergence of a number of Islamic "rationalists" who are building a case for Muslim societies to change from within, and for Muslim minorities in western countries to change how they think of themselves in relation to wider society. They include the British-Pakistani writer and thinker Ziauddin Sardar, the philosophers Tariq Ramadan (Swiss-Egyptian) and Abdolkarim Soroush (Iranian)."

Masood explores the basis of their different approaches but points out that all "want Muslim societies—and minorities—that are vibrant, just, humane, at peace with themselves and with modernity. They also agree that elements of the practice of Islam can be of benefit to the modern west: the importance of family networks; a strong framework for morals; social responsibility." It is interesting to note that the 'scholar activists' Masood highlights are Western based and are in a unique position to syn-

cont on p5/
July 2006

THE LORD OF FISSION - ISLAM, GOD & NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Dr. Usama Hasan was trained in Theoretical Physics at Cambridge, and in the traditional Islamic sciences at home in London. A Senior Lecturer in Computing Science at Middlesex University and a voluntary, part-time **Imam** at Tawhid Mosque in east London, Dr. Usama brought both strands of knowledge together to deliver this thought-provoking talk on 17th June 2006.

Falaq means to split or cleave asunder, hence the Qur'anic term, "**falaq**" in the **surah** of the same name refers to day-break, the splitting apart of the seed and fruit-stone, etc. Applying the principles of **tafsir** (Quran-commentary) to current scientific knowledge would suggest that "**falaq**" covers nuclear fission also. Therefore, Allah as **Rabb al-Falaq** (Q. 113:1) is the Lord of Fission. Reflecting on the very next **ayah** (Q. 113:2), we have the insight that nuclear fission can potentially be used for great evil.

Dr. Usama argued that **Shari'ah** permits nuclear power in principle, since there

is nothing to say that it is prohibited. However, **Shari'ah** also ensures and calls for what is best for people's faith, life, wealth, society etc. plus what is good for the environment and says that nature must be respected.

Therefore, if it is true (as put forward in a recent report by an environmentalist group) that Britain does not need nuclear power and that it can meet all its remaining energy needs via renewable energy and reducing energy waste, then the principles of **Shari'ah** would dictate that we avoid nuclear power, given the risks of contamination, nuclear waste, nuclear accidents, etc.

On the issue of nuclear weapons, Dr. Usama (who was tempted to join Pakistan's nuclear programme but is now very glad that he didn't!) said that WMDs are prohibited in principle since they kill indiscriminately and do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. Furthermore, he pointed to the Prophet's (pbuh) statement

that "Only the Lord of Fire can punish with fire." (A **hadith** which would also seem to prohibit much of modern, conventional warfare.)

However, if one's enemy has WMDs, one is allowed to develop them as well as a deterrent and if the enemy should use it, is one allowed to respond in equal measure, based on the principle of retaliation? In exceptional circumstances, could one even strike first if it was *known for certain* that the enemy was about to use WMDs?

This awful dilemma arises, said Usama, because the principle of deterrence is based on that of retaliation: a deterrent that will never be used is no deterrent at all.

Given such moral dilemmas, plus the exorbitant cost of developing WMDs at the expense of health, agriculture and other social necessities, all the principles of **Shari'ah** would seem to point to the fact that we MUST strive for nuclear disarmament and in fact ban and remove WMDs from the world entirely.

Furthermore, he said, we should do our best to eliminate warfare from the world; if it

The Lord of Fission

Continued from p3

is ever necessary, it must be carried out according to the strict rules of *Jihad*. Therefore, there is a strong case to be made from *Shari'ah* in support of the Movement Against War championed by Joseph Rotblat, Bruce Kent and others, since modern warfare is intrinsically barbaric and far-removed from the mercy of traditional *Jihad*.

Following the talk, the

participants found much to discuss. One key point was whether it was right for a Muslim country, and Pakistan was specifically mentioned, to commit so much money to developing a nuclear arsenal when so many other sectors, education, health etc were so underdeveloped. Questions were raised as to whether there was a real threat from India or whether vested, (and

it was suggested, corrupt), interests hijacked the argument. The dilemma facing Iran was also discussed given the threats it no doubt felt from the US, who Dr. Usama said, have absolutely no right to lecture the world about WMDs, terrorism or any kind of morality when they perpetrated the nuclear atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Getting a grip on problems, continued from page 3

thesise their cultural and religious experiences as Muslims in the West.

The majority of Muslims are taught to believe that the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God as revealed to Muhammad (pubh) and that human agency did not interfere with the process from revelation to transcription. Islam is also regarded by most believers as fixed and unchanging— which has led many people to resisting modernity. Although as Masood points out, modernisation is not in itself a problem, indeed the world over there are many people that do not want to modernise or certainly not at the behest and down the barrell of the West's guns, a literalist approach to understanding and practising Islam has been detrimental - treatment of women, punishment law implementation which undermines **Shar'iah** principles of justice and compassion, attitudes to non-Muslims (including justification of violence against all non-Muslims whether civillian or not) and participation in public and political life etc have all been affected.

"For Islam's rationalists", says Masood, "literalism in **Shari'ah** is just another manifestation of the way that, in homes, mosques and madrassas the world over, the Koran (*sic*) today is taught with little reference to the context of its revelation; nor to the fact that it was often a response to the circumstances that the first community of Muslims faced. If, say the literalists, the Koran says that men must inherit twice as much as women (because under Shari'a, men are protectors of women), then this must still apply—regardless of the existence of a new consensus which says women are entitled to the same rights as men. The lack of importance placed on context is reflected in the fact that very few translations of the Koran bother to provide any historical background."

Although Ramadan, Sardar and Soroosh agree that the Qur'an needs to be seen as a broad set of guidelines on "how to organise a just society, and not a detailed manual of dos and don'ts" there isn't such a consensus when one asks what do we next and who should do it. "Can it be left to individuals? Or should it be religious scholars? And who should decide who counts as a scholar? Do the scholars need to be accountable? Should their interpretations apply nationally or internationally?" The questions posed by Masood show that the Istanbul conference delegates have a lot of work to do and it will not be made any easier by the fundamentally different answers they have indicated they have to these questions - a difference which has already caused inter-scholar ructions.

Book Review

Understanding Islam The First Ten Steps

by Swadeka Ahsun

The Launch of the book *Understanding Islam The First Ten Steps*, by Dr. Chris Hewer took place in March at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. It was attended by academics, scholars, laymen, media and reporters as well as friends of Dr. Hewer.

As I bought a copy of Dr. Chris Hewer's book and read it, I decided to write a review.

Dr. Hewer, a fellow of the St. Ethelburga's Centre, in '*Understanding Islam, The First Ten Steps*' has tried to explain various aspects of Islam to a Western audience. As Dr. Hewer had been living in Birmingham while writing the book, he has really aimed to make Islam accessible and informative. He has also treated his subject in a narrative style and has thought to express various concepts in his own way, therefore making the book readable. He has also tried to bridge traditional Muslim customs and modes of worship with other modes of worship which, as a Western theologian, he would know about.

While reading *Understanding Islam, The First Ten Steps*, I also noticed that some of the terms that had been used attempt to provide a modern example

of the phenomenon. For instance, a migration from Mecca to Medina is written by the author in terms of asylum-seeking.

I thought some of these analogies were a bit far-fetched, for example the unknown and possibly sacred liaison between Allah and Muhammad is described extensively as being 'like a loud speaker, coupled to an amplifier and as a tape recorder, it tends its diaphragm to the process of making the sounds we hear'. Also, some of the terminology is strange, for example, 'the description of the Qur'an as the early deposit of speech of God in Arabic.'

The author is well versed in history, therefore he reports historical tradition but it is without any critical analysis. He also attempts to show some of the problems he, as a Western theologian, has experienced in dealing with Muslim theology.

Dr. Hewer did not make any particular critical point in his book. The audience for *Understanding Islam, The First Ten Steps* is those with a good broad information about Islam but who don't need to have a critical, thoroughly scholarly interest.

As '*Understanding Islam, The First Ten Steps*

has been published only recently, some of the chapters attempt to analyse the current position of Islam in the West. The author can only introduce the topic of Muslim culture in a European state, rather than giving an in depth analysis. This is a book which is easy to read, broad in its topics but it has some limitations, if it were to be approached by someone seeking critical scholarship.

Swadeka Ahsun is an Ambassador for peace (IIFWP 2004). She is an artist and exhibits most recently in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury's wife at Lambeth Palace. Her work is currently on show at IslamExpo.

Understanding Islam - The First Ten Steps - 2006, C.T.R. Hewer SCM Press.

*IN THE NEXT ISSUE
MUSIC
EDUCATION
AND MUSLIMS
BY
DR. DIANA HARRIS.*

**HAVE
YOU
RENEWED?**

RUQAIYYAH'S NEW BOOK

Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood reports that the latest update of her book 'Islam' in the Hodder and Stoughton Teach Yourself series is fresh from the press. She says she is proud to report that the last edition was one of Hodder's best sellers, and I have high hopes for the

new version which is considerably longer, fuller, and includes the recent history of politicisation in Islam, a lot of post 9/11 and 7/7 material, plus hopes for the future of Islam in the UK in the 21st Century. Gender issues like child marriage, female genital mutilation are also covered.

Conversations, cont. from p2

grouped with three to four women of other or no faith to discuss issues such as role of women in Islamic and Christian teachings, perceptions of each other, concepts of modesty in different tradition as it affects dress etc.

The conversations proved extremely popular and it is hoped that the format will be developed to encompass more topics which were thrown up at the initial meeting including topics such as male/female relations in different

traditions, balancing gender and sexual equality imperatives with religious equality in society and differing ideas of the role of the person of faith in society.

AMR was also represented at the meeting by members Nabila Elahi and associates Fauzia Ahmad and Rookshana Patrick.

● Dr. Usama Hasan also participated in a meeting in The Tent on the issue of faith attitudes to nuclear weapons. The meeting was held on June 6th.

DR. IMTIAZ LEAVES UK

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad, a member of AMR's Governing Council, left the UK at the end of April to join her husband in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

They plan to be in the UK again towards the end of August/in early September when AMR hopes to invite them to a Forum where Dr. Karim Allaoui will speak on development issues.

Criminologist to speak

Muslim criminologist, Dr. Muzammil Quraishi, will, it is hoped, speak at AMR's Forum in either October or November. The Salford University-based academic recently published a book on crime and criminal justice. His research work has taken him to Pakistan, France and Turkey - and even led to him spending nine months in prison (in the interests of research).

Donation, cont. from p2

AMR is participating in a proposed Peace Council being established in Lewisham, SE London which brings together interested groups. One of the aims of the Council will be to provide educational input into state schools in the borough to increase children's awareness around militarism. An aspect of this will be to provide input to History lessons and Citizenship lessons so that a) more children are informed of the background to current areas of conflict and b) children with backgrounds in countries seen as problematic will be included in lessons which in the past have marginalised or excluded their historical experiences.

The Council's membership includes Race and Equality Alliance Lewisham, Stop The War, CND, Respect The Unity Coalition, Council youth service and Lewisham's Youth Mayor.

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

Thanks for the newsletter. You did an excellent job summarising and giving a very faithful representation of my talk.

You may be interested to know that I attended the QCA Forum on 'Inclusivity in the Curriculum'. It was a very high-powered gathering of educationalists and others; I hope my contribution will have made some impact on behalf of our community.

Tariq Wilkinson



Dates For Your Diary

Sunday 5th August - Launch of Lewisham Peace Council. Venue to be confirmed. Talks, stalls, music. Speakers include: Dr. Bruce Kent, Dr. Mohammad Tabarra.

Friday 25th August - Monday 28th August AMR Annual Convention, the Wilderness Centre, Gloucestershire.

September - date to be confirmed - Forum talk by Dr. Karim Allaoui on *Islamic Development*

October - date to be confirmed - Forum talk on *Islam and Criminology* by Dr. Muzammil Qureshi

November - date to be confirmed - Forum talk on Secular Zionist Political Literature by Heba Youssef.

Proposed for 2007: series of Forum talks related to conflict and conflict resolution



From Google

Should we be involved in the Movement Against War? AMR Forum, Islam, God & Nuclear Weapons

"Recommended Site-Seeing"

AMR's Turkish-Irish IT expert, Seref O'Holik, cherry-picks some of the most interesting websites he has recently visited (with the aid of one-off assistant Redsfan Ibrahim):

☞ IslamOnline News
www.islamonline.net

☞ Prospect magazine
www.prospect.co.uk

☞ Family tree research surprise - Brooke Shields may be distantly related to the Prophet (pbuh)
http://www.livescience.com/history/ap_royal_roots.html

☞ Muslims of Europe conference
<http://www.muslimsofeurope.com/>

☞ Liverpool the Muslim FC
www.liverpoolfc.tv
(also the greatest)

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