



AMR News

No Change and All Change at AGM

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AMR News

AMR News is published every three months (God Willing). The articles published in AN 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, by March 15th 2006.

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of Muslim
Researchers 2005

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AMR's well-attended AGM, held on the Sunday of the Convention heard that there had been no change in the disappointing lower trajectory of activities and income begun in 2004. Reporting on the publication of its Annual Report, both Farzin Deravi and Tippu Sheriff said there was a relationship between the lower levels of activity and lower than hoped for income to the organisation. Of concern was the



AMR Convention. President-elect Mohammed Dhalech (second from right) with AMR's past and future

continued poor attendance at Forum meetings, though a bright spot had been the relative success of the regional Forums. This approach should, it was felt be continued.

The success of the Convention which had been largely organised by younger members of AMR was discussed in terms of the future of the AMR being in the hands of its young. With both Hashim Reza and Tippu Sheriff announcing their intentions to stand down as office-bearers, it was suggested that this was the opportunity to bring new life to the organisation. Mohammed Dhalech was unanimously selected to take over as President and long-standing member Hajira Qureshi agreed to take over as Treasurer. It was also suggested that Council members should play an active part in the running of the organisations and those who indicate that they cannot, due to personal circumstances, should not be retained on sentimental grounds if they could no longer fulfill their responsibilities.

CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE FAIR

AMR's efforts to make progress and develop the outcomes of the Horrid History event held in February have been given a small and localised boost through its involvement in the Lewisham Peace Fair held on Saturday 9 September 2006.

The Fair, held in the SE London borough was co-organised with a range of peace and anti-war organisations including the United Nations Association, Stop the War, CND and members of the local mosque.

Approximately 200 people at the peak of the event were present to listen to presentations and hear live performances by local youngsters. The Council's head of Youth Services, who had played an instrumental role in supporting the organising of the event, and one of the senior Librarians of the borough were also present.

The Fair was designed to build momentum towards the holding of a re-vamped Peace Council for Lewisham

which is to be held in the Town Hall on 30th October. Work of the Council will include many things such as promoting inter-community harmony and better understanding of conflict in the world and the role of the British Government.

Of particular interest to AMR was the possibility of helping to develop in one area at least, an opportunity to input into the way in which History and Citizenship is taught in Lewisham schools.

Ex-President of AMR, Mohammad Tabarra who initiated the whole History focus earlier this year and Farah Elahi (standing in for Usama Hasan who was on the programme but couldn't make the event), made excellent. Mohammad spoke on the reasons why he had initiated the call for a more inclusive and relevant History in schools and Farah made an appeal to people as a young person herself, to give support and succour to the people of Palestine. AMR's role was very much appreciated

as an example of the sort of engagement with mainstream society which is needed more than ever in the context of the Muslim community being stigmatised. There was also an excellent contribution from Rania Hafez who is a lecturer at UEL in post-statutory education and had been invited to speak by AMR.

Although the event did not live up to all the expectations of the organisers, much good was achieved, especially in smaller group discussions. Discussions with Southwark diocese representative Roy Tindle and others succeeded in producing an agenda for AMR action in the future. Progressive organisations are required to be in the vanguard of bridging communities.

Rania and Asma Meer who are trying to encourage the local mosque to get activated to reach out to the local community may also need support for this from us. This is apart from the citizenship/history input that we are hoping to advance through such activity.

Terror threat suspicion turned to AMR advantage

The news that a senior police officer had said that any Muslim groups going into the countryside should be the objects of suspicion

and should be reported on, broke in the run up to the Convention. It inspired the suggestion that the police should be invited to the Conven-

tion to explain the comment and answer questions. Inspector Bob Lambert of the Muslim Contact Unit of the Met

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Career to Carer - it could be you

Unless one is directly affected by disability, the fact that it not only impacts very dramatically and directly on the life of the person who is disabled but also on his or her family is little known and appreciated. The attendance of long-standing AMR member, Aisha Lowry, at the Convention brought this reality to our attention. If disability strikes 'overnight' - through illness, accident or criminality (Frank Gardener, Abigail Witchell), people with careers become carers and the individual and family's hopes and aspirations are all but forgotten in a new struggle to simply cope with the adjustments needed to deal with a situation in which somebody who was independent and indeed depended upon, has become the dependant and the focus of the whole of the family's care.

Quite apart from the psychological and emotional upheaval this causes which is huge to say the least, the practicalities of the new situation, especially financial, can be breath-takingly dramatic. The possibility of the person of modest means being gradually reduced to penury and poverty would be unknow to anyone except for those who know this experience only too well as the long-term carers of disabled relatives who were born with a handicapping condition or developed such a condition some time ago.

It is only the disabled person and his carer who knows what it means to struggle to make ends meet on the means tested weekly Carers' Allowance of £45.70 per week - not all carers even receive this. So, imagine the impact of coping with this new reality when you or your near relation is suddenly disabled through illness or injury and the other partner or relative has to give up a well-paid career for a new career as a carer. It scarcely bears thinking about but, until and unless we all think "There but for the grace of God go I, and so if my grace runs out, I better ensure that there is a good provision, I may need it...", there will be no pressure on the Government to address the poverty of the disabled and their carers.

It is clear altruism has failed to motivate us to care about this issue; perhaps selfish self-interest will be a better motivator. It is estimated that there are perhaps 11 million carers (and not 6 million, as many have thought) in the UK, who each save taxpayers £30.00 per week (and the Government £57 billion a year). It is no wonder that whilst lip-service is paid to the good work of carers, the basic fact is that carers' good will and devotion is exploited by the Government and if truth be told, we the people. After all, it is we who consistently vote for low income-tax promising parties and disavow even the most meagre proposal to increase taxes to pay for needed services as sacrilege.

In this situation, the lack of funds for the disabled and their carers is never addressed - presumably because we hope and expect that we will never have to live in a style other than the one to which we are accustomed and if other people have to think twice about being able to afford going out for a cup of tea and a bun as an occasional treat - or have to get about everywhere on, horror of horrors, public transport because they can't afford to run a car, *so what?!*

This maybe society's attitude, but it surely should not be ours, and Aisha's attendance at the Convention brought home the need to be more aware about these issues. *Sarah Sheriff*

BY AISHA LOWRY

The beginning was not auspicious; having decided to 'top and tail' our visit to The Wilderness Centre with stays at a nearby B & B and thus avoid Bank Holiday travel stresses. On being asked what we were doing at the Centre, I was stunned to have the question followed with "Well, I hope you are not planning to blow us all up!" This remark haunted me for the next few days especially as I was aware the guest speaker was an anti-terrorism policeman. A happy ending was achieved when I picked up a booklet at the Centre titled *'Mohammad, Why We Love Him, Islam The Way of Peace'*. This was graciously accepted by the remark-maker who surprised me

'They all seemed to be having a great time'

somewhat by saying she intended to visit the Sudan next year!

I digress however. It was with mixed feelings that I arrived at the Centre. I was accompanied by my son who has Down's Syndrome. One of my motivations in attending was to make the issue of disability literally visible in the person of my son. I had trepidation - how would he be received? What if he misbehaved! I had also 'pepped' myself up for other issues I had wanted to discuss which had nothing to do with disability but more about the growing concerns of my own about the values of Muslims in neo-con consumerist society.

I need not have

worried about my son. He is sociable in his way and enjoys company. He loved the big kitchen and being able to wash up in a really big sink and to eat with so many new people. Younger children always seem curious when they see people so obviously different from themselves and one little girl accompanied by her father did ask me about Down's Syndrome. It was difficult to answer as fully and freely as I might have liked because my son was next to me. Nonetheless, I felt this was a healthy approach. Better to allow a child to ask questions then just tell them to not stare.

The discussions I had hoped for just did not happen on a group level which was a disappointment. Nevertheless there was an easy flow of impromptu meetings with new people and conversations, snatches of which I still ponder on and find myself floating back to. I remember discussing cousin marriage with a doctor brother, **hijab** and the conflicts of work, identity in this society, the work life balance. All very stimulating. I did miss the presence of

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*President Dr Hashim Reza putting his best foot forward
Cont from p5/*

older people, as there were lots of young people. Mind they'd have to be older than I! A 60+ group! I was so impressed by their obvious self confidence without a touch of arrogance. They all seemed to be having a great time coming back in the evening after 'going-ape', horse-riding, climbing and other energetic pursuits that left me breathless. I was happy to enjoy the wonderful vista of Gloucestershire country-

side from benches outside the Centre.

A bit of regression was fun and my son and I enjoyed card-making and glass-painting under the capable tuition of Nazneen. Very relaxing and bringing back memories of art class in far off school days.

The Syrian breakfast was another memorable experience. It reminded me that although we are all Muslims, we have different cultural backgrounds and it

was fun to feel that not everyone in this world breakfasts on cornflakes everyday!

The BBQ and the talk by policeman Bob Lambert was very interesting. He made many valuable points and I admired his courage and that of his wife in joining us. Then there was the surprise arrival of the Muslim Scouts who gave a presentation. I had no idea that they existed and had such a varied programme on offer.

Good weather for the most part added to our enjoyment and the beautiful views around us from the garden and landscape which change colour by the hour. I even played cricket for the first time in my life in my 60th year! Willow touched 'leather' and I actually hit the ball!

Al hamdulillah, an enjoyable time and *insha Allah*, one to be repeated.

THE VIEW... ...FROM FARAH

GoApe

We used different types of setups involving ropes to get from tree to tree. It was ok but involved too much concentration for my liking. There were some bits where free fall was involved and in my opinion those were the best bits.

Canoeing

I went kayaking. It was my first time and it was brilliant. You actually felt as if you were sitting on the water it was amazing.

Climbing

It was good, we didn't climb very high but we had to climb up and crawl through

this cave and then absail down the other side. It was kind of a three-in-one activity.

Outdoor games

They were good because more people could get involved and they were more about teamwork than the offsite activities. I think the cricket game was something everyone participating enjoyed a lot.

Arrangements

When you are with your friends it doesn't matter where you're staying.

Food

I think everyone was impressed by the pasta that

the GIRLS made.

BBQ / Talk

The BBQ was yummy as always. As for the talk I didn't really feel as if it answered the questions that I had but I think it did raise other important issues in terms of our responsibility to work with the community.

The next event

I don't know how realistic it is but I'm going to try and find an activity that can involve everyone working together. Some kind of treasure hunt maybe.

Farah Elahi (organiser)

MUSIC EDUCATION AND MUSLIMS

Let me make a comment I didn't expect to be making when I offered to review this book. There is eye-opening stuff in this book which could help us identify areas needing improvement most urgently.

It should be read widely by parents and mosque officials and **imams**. With that out of the way, I trust the author will take any unfavourable comments in the spirit of constructive criticism that might help improve it for the second edition.

The author lectures at the Open University and is a researcher into music education, who in 1991 started teaching performing arts at a girls' high school in Luton, with a majority of Muslim pupils. She found "*girls who only mimed in class singing lessons, constantly forgot their kit for dance lessons...*" and found herself put in awkward positions with other pupils pleading "*Don't tell my parents I dance..*" and "*..a talented flute player... can no longer play now she is a 'woman'...*".

Later she undertook doctoral research on the problems of performing arts within a Muslim Pakistani community so this book draws heavily on that research and the author's extensive experience of the realities of modern Muslim communities in the UK.

Most of what I con-

sider the real meat is in the middle four parts.

In the first chapter "Introduction" Dr Harris quotes a number of 'authorities' expressing statements about real Muslim practice without contrasting it with recommended practice from Islamic sources (**Qur'an** and **Sunnah**) until quite a few pages later. So, in a bookshop I would probably have put the book back on the shelf after reading page three! For example I took exception to this statement made by A. Talbani quoted from some journal on the Muslim view of knowledge: "*Knowledge above that minimally required to meet daily social and economic needs is considered dangerous.*"

If you believe this, and considering the number of times I have had to use algebra on a daily social and economic basis (*ie* almost none), you might not believe that algebra was invented by a Muslim (considered by many as the greatest mathematician in history: Alkharizmi - whose name is also the root of the English word algorithm). Now, Talbani sounds like a Muslim author, so even our own academics seem to be reinforcing these prejudices about Islam. I think it important that we realise how deep the rot has set. In short, I found myself scribbling notes furiously in the mar-

gins in chapter 1.

After a good while I figured out that the book touches much more than the intersection of the topics music, education and Muslims. It's actually a refreshingly objective snapshot of current-day realities in the Muslim world, showing insight not only in the UK community but also around the world where Dr Harris' research took her: Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and some other places.

There are some disturbing examples of what might easily be seen as hypocrisy amongst Muslims and Dr Harris handles her interviews with tact, eliciting statements from the interviewees and leaving it to the reader to draw their own conclusions. Muslims themselves should read this and look in the mirror. Half of a problem is solved simply by admitting that it actually exists.

As a Pakistani immigrant myself, much of what I read resonated strongly with my own experiences and I found it refreshing to see problems highlighted that my own family tend to brush under the carpet. There were also surprises for me, for example the way educated Pakistanis 'back home' view the communities that have settled in the UK.

An example of what resonated is this description of her UK-based rela-

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tives from a girl interviewed in Pakistan: "...he got married at the age of 19, a very early age, and now he's about to have his sixth child. He's away in Saudi Arabia at the moment and his wife is having problems because she's an illiterate person and she doesn't know how to handle the kids..".

For example this opinion about Watford and Birmingham from a Pakistani the author interviewed who moved to the UK temporarily for work: "He said he was ashamed of the Pakistani communities in Watford and Birmingham because they were so insular...spoke no English and made no attempt to learn it...would never integrate with english people." In contrast he opined: "English people in Manchester, he believed, had a better impression of people from Pakistan."

Amusingly in one Pakistani TV programme the term BBC apparently stood

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Swadeka Ahsun, AMR member, was part of a British Muslim delegation which met with Indonesian visitors during September to discuss issues around engagement and conflict resolution. The group visited Ulster and also Manchester.

AMR News

for British Born Confused.

On the issue of whether music is halal or haram etc., Dr Harris lets muslims speak for themselves. She interviews almost 15 people from widely different backgrounds. A wide variety of opinions are documented, some of which patently hold no water, and others which are clearly well reasoned and backed up by references to the **Qur'an** and **Hadith**.

Good input from Tariq Ramadan, Ruqaiyyah Maqsood and Yusuf al Qaradawi.. with other contributors falling into the trap of obvious axe-grinding and / or an attitude of their knowing what's good for the rest of us. (E.g. one Muslim character who's a professional-level musician, but who as a governor of a school is pushing quite hard against music in the school... from the sublime to the cor-blimey!)

Some of the failings of the book. Dr Harris writes at the beginning of chapter two: "Islam was begun by the Prophet Muhammad"... whereas, in the interests of clarity she might have written:

"Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.."

This is because Muhammad, Peace be on him, never claimed to be more than a messenger. L Ron Hubbard may have started Scientology, but all the monotheistic religions

from Adam, through Moses, Abraham and finally Muhammad, were started by God.

There are a number of other errors that are no doubt the result of listening to Muslims who themselves don't know the difference between:

- *Waharis* (should have been *Wahabis*?)

- *Ramadan vs Eid*

- *Sheihk* (should have been *sheikh*)

- *Zikr vs Azan*

But don't let these side-issues distract you from the content.

by Fazl Rahman

Title: *Music Education And Muslims*

Author: Diana Harris

Publisher: Trentham Books
ISBN: 13:978-1-85856-356-5

Stats: ca. 150 pages pb.

Terror...cont from p2/

very kindly agreed to this and gave the fire-side talk.

He confided opinions which were refreshingly different from a lot of what is said in the press and members found the session interesting. Some of the younger members subjected the inspector to tough questioning. He has since commented, "I really enjoyed the discussion, it was a marvellous atmosphere".

TWINS BORN

Dr. Usama Hasan announced the birth of twins in August. The children's are Layla and Humayd.

October 2006



Dates For Your Diary

Sunday 29th October 11am-3pm

Eid gathering / Sunday Funday, Croydon Sports Centre. Separate swimming and sports for men and women. Lunch. Reserve in advance please by contacting amr.org@btinternet.com

Saturday 4th November

Male-Female Relations: Women in Dialogue. 2pm - 4pm, St Ethelburga's Centre. Ring 020 7496 1610 for a place. Women only.

Saturday 11th November

Islam and Criminology with Muzammil Quraishi (to be confirmed).

Sunday 26th November

Sunday Funday at Croydon High School. (Apologies, the proposed Forum on development did not take place as Dr. Allaoui was not able to come to the UK as planned).

"Recommended Site-Seeing"

AMR's Turkish-Irish IT expert, Seref O'Holik, cherry-picks some of the most interesting websites he has recently visited:

☞ A site to obtain information from archived newspapers
www.newspaperarchive.com

☞ A site featuring parallel translations of the Qur'an
http://www.clay.smith.name/Parallel_Quran.htm

☞ Down's Syndrome charity and information organisation
www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

☞ Sadaqah or zakat to disburse
www.justgiving.com

☞ The encyclopaedia that you can edit yourself!
www.wikipedia.org



Rania Hafez who spoke at the Peace Fair

HAVE YOU RENEWED?

PLEASE REMEMBER TO RENEW PROMPTLY.

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