

FROM THE CHAIR

"Do you know what are the rights of neighbours? Help him if he asks for your help; give him relief if he seeks your relief. Lend him if he needs a loan. Show him concern if he is distressed. Nurse him when he is ill. Attend his funeral if he dies. Congratulate him if he meets any good. Sympathise with him if any calamity befalls him. Do not block his air by raising your building high without his permission. Harass him not." (Saying (Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad)

Who is my neighbour? What do I owe him? What can he expect from me? Where does obligation cease and compassion begin? And, where does decency and compassion end and self-defence begin?

Many people around the world – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – have been asking these questions over recent months.

In Australia, we have seen the MV Tampa and Woomera Detention Centre up close and the World Trade Centre Towers far away.

Each example raises similar questions. Who is different from me? What is it that makes us different? And, how do my family and I live in safety and peace without sacrificing justice, law and order or my sense of decency and compassion?

These are complicated matters, requiring multifaceted responses. Valid questions about US and Australian foreign policy in the Middle East (especially Palestine) and Afghanistan plus Australia's refugee obligations under international law have become difficult to ask – without seeming too much "the other", "un-Australian" or "un-American". Yet ask them we must.

To do otherwise is the true "un-Australianness". A fair go, equal rights under law and innocence until proven guilty are in peril in "these troubled times" – as our elected leaders choose to call them. As Australians, we need to question our Government's policies – offshore and outback.

To do otherwise would also be utterly "un-Islamic". The Hadith quoted above makes clear our obligations to our brothers and sisters – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – stretching from New York to the South Australian desert.

In 1888, a boatload of Chinese families fleeing persecution and oppression was refused landing rights in both Sydney and Melbourne. They were branded what we now call "economic refugees" and sent away to seek their future elsewhere. The name of their boat? *"The Afghan"!*

Let this irony of history remain just that and not become part of our common future. To do otherwise must remain unthinkable.

Ali Roude OAM

(Feb. 2002)

TELSTRA leading the way



Mr. Ted Pretty
Group Managing Director, Telstra

At the Telstra sponsored 2001 Iftar dinner, the Chairman of the Islamic Council, Mr Ali Roude said that for the thirty days of Ramadan, Muslims feel a sense of humility and sacrifice as they empathise with people worse off than themselves. It is a month of tolerance and self-discipline for Muslim communities around the world.

"Here, in Australia, Telstra has led the way in showing the Islamic community that it is recognised as a valued contributor to Australian society, socially and economically. In doing so, Telstra has gained the loyalty of the community.

"As Muslims in Australia we would like to play our part in contributing to the prosperity and peace of this nation. We hope that every Muslim community in the world will also help contribute to the peace and prosperity of the globe," he added.

Representing Telstra, the Group Managing Director, Mr Ted Pretty said: "I hope we can learn more about the rich cultural diversity of our country."

Various Consul Generals, prominent NSW Muslim leaders, and community representatives attended this event, which was held on 12 December 2001.

The Iftar dinner was sponsored by Telstra in conjunction with the Islamic Council.



Mr Ziggy Switkowski, CEO Telstra, with members of the community

Iftar Dinner for asylum seekers

During the Holy Month of Ramadan, Muslims around the world engage in spiritual and charitable activities that foster compassion, mercy and love towards those that are less privileged.

Muslims generally shared the Ramadan spirit by making financial contributions to ensure that this festive season remained a memorable one, especially to those without their loved ones.

The Islamic Council of NSW in conjunction with the Muslim Women's Association and a Group of Mothers on 11 December 2001 organised a first ever Iftar Dinner as a gesture of love and goodwill for Muslim asylum seekers held at the Villawood Detention centre.

The dinner was also organised in response to growing concerns about the psychological state of detainees who were awaiting decisions on their visa status from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

The conditions of asylum seekers in detention centres and the long delays in the process of visa applications had caused grave concerns for both Muslims and non-Muslim alike. An urgent review on the handling of the asylum seekers is well overdue.

The experience of meeting the asylum seekers had a deep impact on all the members of the organising committee and the religious leaders who were involved.

The asylum seekers were quite touched by this initiative, not to mention the joy and excitement that were brought to the faces of the mothers and children who were treated with monetary and other end of Ramadan (EID) gifts.

This and similar events will be organised in the future as a way of showing our support to those who have fled oppression, injustice and economic deprivations.

Our thanks to the members of the Muslim Women's Association, the committed mothers group and to every person and Muslim business within the Muslim community who gave generously to bring a smile to the faces of the detainees especially during the month of Ramadan when we focus less on ourselves and more on those that are struggling to exist.

Our thanks also are extended to Mr Refat Selvi, and the staff at the Villawood Detention centre for allowing us to organise this memorable event.

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OBITUARY: Mr Sam Issa



Mr Sam Issa

The Islamic Council and members of the Muslim community of NSW are deeply saddened by the sudden loss of Mr Sam Issa on Monday the 29th January this year at the age of 50. Mr Sam Issa has left an indelible mark on the Australian Muslim affairs. The high standards he set for himself and for others will long be remembered.

Mr Sam Issa of course is best known for his generosity and the unsurpassed commitment to the community, especially his support and assistance to most of the landmark Muslim projects. In many respects, he has remained a household name in the community.

What is perhaps less known about Mr Sam Issa is that he was very successful in running his own business, the 'Paradise Kitchens'. He had set standards that even today are hard to match. In the course of his business career he inspired many entrepreneurs.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to work with him or befriend him have benefited greatly from this experience. He has left us a legacy of his hard work and skills that will continue to serve the community.

We are grateful for the example he set, and the high standards he maintained, and hope to see his tradition of dedication to the Muslim community continue. His name will continue to be a credit to Muslim community.

The executive committees, members and staff of the Islamic Council of NSW extend their sincere condolences to all his family and friends, acknowledging the sacrifices they made that enabled him to perform his work. Our prayers are with him.

EXTRACTS FROM: "A test of character" by Chris Puplick

"Australians who are also Moslems or who come from countries of the Middle East and West Asia have been a part of our national life for centuries. The Ghan train which traverses our continent from north to south takes its name from the Afghan camel drivers who were welcome here in the mid nineteenth century and contributed to the development of inland continent. The mosque in Broken Hill is one of the very earliest religious structures in the country. The special relationship we have with the Turkish people forged in the blood and sand of Gelibou (Gallipoli) is like few others. We trade extensively with the Middle East for meat and wheat; we send our best horses to race in Dubai and our best cricketers to play in Sajah. Increasingly people from the Middle East are displacing the Japanese tourists in our Queensland resorts.

"It is easy to seek revenge, but what we really want is justice. We want those who have committed crimes to be brought to account and to be punished by whatever methods are available to us under national and international law, including the right to self-defence.

"There can be no place for displacing our righteous anger and justified fury onto people who not only have nothing to do with the crime but who abhor it in the same sense of moral outrage as anyone else."

(Courtesy: *Equal time*, "A test of character" by Chris Puplick President of the Anti Discrimination Board, November 2001)

Islamic House: laying down the foundation

The Australian Islamic House, one of the Islamic Council's member societies, is pleased to announce that the first phase of their mosque and centre project in Liverpool, has now been completed.

Last Ramadan the committee had been extremely busy with this phase of the project, liaising with the local council and engineers, making all necessary alterations to the architectural plan of the mosque, and completing the concrete work of the foundation.

It was estimated that an amount of \$201, 000.00 that was successfully raised has been spent on the project so far.

The Australian Islamic House would like to thank everyone for their overwhelming support, especially the engineer Mr Majid El Hawat, and Mr Mohammad, who is in charge of the project.

The committee is appealing to all Muslims for financial contribution to fund the second phase, due to start very soon.

For donations and further information please contact:

The Project Manager
Mr Talal Hamdoon
0411 177 122
02 9607 5848



Multi-faith forum for harmony and tolerance

In response to the Sept. 11 attacks on US buildings, a multi-faith forum was organised to address community concerns and fears in Sydney.

Addressing the public forum titled 'Islam In A Multifaith Australia', the NSW Premier Bob Carr described the ethnic diversity of NSW as 'an economic asset' and 'a comparative advantage'.

The Premier said that Muslim boys and girls have been subject to the inhumanity of being threatened and that children should be proud of their Arab-Islamic background.

Several representatives from members of the Islamic Council, the church and the media also addressed the forum, which was organised by the Community Relations Commission (formerly known as the Ethnic Affairs Commission).

Sheikh Abdurahman Asaroglu representing the Redfern mosque said that stereotypes would encourage feelings of difference.

"Our role is to expand our knowledge and understanding. Currently we are physically together but socially distant," he added.

Mr Keyzar Trad, the vice president of the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA), said that Islam categorically condemns the persecution of people of any other belief.

"Whoever wants to adopt the religion [Islam] can and whoever doesn't want to doesn't have to. There is no compulsion in religion," he said.

Bishop Robert Forsyth from the Anglican Church of South Sydney said that Anglican Christians were committed

Currently we are physically together but socially distant.

to a multi-racial tolerant society and that they were in support of refugee resettlement, active community attitudes and living in harmony.

"The Church abhors violence, which intimidates devout belief," the Bishop said.

University Professor Ahmad Shboul, asked whether Australians were to be defined by their religious background or appearance, saying that Islam should not be looked at through the lens of fear.

"Being afraid has led to many seeking a superficial understanding of the religion by asking artificial questions such as: 'Why do women wear the Hijab?' Or 'Does Islam lean toward violence more than Christianity?'" Professor Shboul said.

Explaining the importance of inter-religious collaboration, Mr Kevin Manning from the Archdiocese of Parramatta said: "We must understand and respect one another because we are surrounded by a great deal of misinformation."

Also attending the forum, among other distinguished guests, was the Commissioner of the Community Relations Commission, Dr Jamal Rifi.

New YOUTH initiatives

Following widespread consultation, local politicians, ethnic leaders, and community representatives met last December to address various issues of youth of Arabic background.

The Minister for Public Works and Services, the Hon Morris Iemma unveiled new youth initiatives:

- To appoint two youth Liaison teams consisting of two groups of three people going out to young people hanging out in the Canterbury-Bankstown, Liverpool and St George areas in an attempt to keep away from anti-social behaviour; and

- To address parents' concerns with regard to discipline, control, and communication with children.

There were also plans to work with the school.

The Minister agreed there was a lack of recreation and sporting facilities in these areas, saying that the more facilities available the less chance of kids engaging in anti-social behaviour.

It was also announced that a funding amount of \$25, 000 had been approved for selected areas with a high population of Arabic youths.

He added that the program would only be successful with the support of the community.

"The Premier's Department was also looking at getting involved with Rugby League Clubs to see how they might be able to get involved in promoting sport for young people," the Minister said.

The Minister for Fisheries, Hon Eddie Obeid said: "We must work together to solve problems and recognise that we can't fix everything.

"We must recognise that our children are changing. We must recognise that many schools expel students before understanding the nature of the conflict that may exist within the child or in the child's home.

"A lot of tension is created through the differences in perception parents may have about what's wrong and what's right as opposed to what the children are being taught to believe what is wrong and what is right.

"We have a long way to go. One must start with their house and try to establish an understanding with the child before resorting to violence.

"The law is behind us we are responsible for each other and ourselves. Our problems do not relate to religion," he added.

For his part, the Chair of the Community Relations Commission, Mr Stepan Kerkasharian, said that the new initiatives were the 'most exciting' that the community had been involved in.

"The initiative has been a genuine partnership between the Government and the community to serve the needs of the Arabic community. There have been positive responses from members of the community," he added.

Ms Nada Nasser from the Premier's Department elaborated on the youth initiative involving providing information strategy to focus on key messages with regard to 'positive parenting'.

Other ideas that emerged from the meeting included parent networking (where parents could talk to one another about their concerns); parenting hotline; and mentoring program at Bankstown TAFE.

LMA Symbiosis Camp 2002

To kick-start the New Year, one of the Islamic Council's members, the Lebanese Moslem Association (LMA) in partnership with Bankstown City Council and the Department of Sport and Recreation organised a four-day camp at Myuna Bay on the beautiful shores of Lake Macquarie. The camp was specifically designed for Muslim young people who are living in the Bankstown Local Government Area.

It was sponsored by Bankstown City Council under the **YOUTH GRANTS PROGRAM**

2001, and the Department of Sport and Recreation also covered the costs of the Basketball referees course and the expenses of the camp.

The Muslim youths were given the opportunity to participate in recreational activities such as Archery, Swimming, Canoeing, Kayaking, Basketball, Tennis, Table Tennis, and other activities such as cooking, cleaning, etc.

Besides recreational activities, the camp was also aimed at helping these young participants to understand their civic and religious duties to the



Youths at the Basket-ball referee course

family and the community.

The various workshops consisted of cross cultural training to help the young people become more tolerant of other cultures and faiths, an understanding of Gender Equity, to gain Employment & Job Skills, and to understand their legal rights.

The issues addressed at the workshops included:

- 'Legal Rights of Young People' facilitated by 'Legal Aid & PCYC Bankstown';
- 'Civic Pride' facilitated by 'Bankstown City Council';
- 'Vietnamese cross-cultural and religious information' facilitated by 'V.A.W.A.';
- 'Gender/Equity issues' by 'The Corner Health Service'; and
- 'Employment & Job skills' by the 'MTC Work Solutions'.

Ten out of thirteen boys who attended the course successfully passed and attained the certificate to be a Basketball referee.

New project to begin this month

Under the 'Work for the DOLE', programme, the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWR/SB) has approved funding for a new project, titled 'Skills and Support' (SAS), which is due to start on the 21 February 2002.

The project is aimed at involving long-term unemployed Muslims in the Canterbury-Bankstown area in the activities and services of the Islamic Council to enhance their employment prospect through community and school based work experience, and will be coordinated by the Islamic Council's Projects' Coordinator, Zeina Harris.

The SAS project will also facilitate the community development strategy of the Islamic Council, particularly in the settlement process of the Muslims of NSW.

Participants are expected to receive training from the MTC Work Solutions and work experience in various community organisations and schools.

The main tasks the participants will be involved in will include customer service, community settlement support services, research and compile media reports, administration, teachers' aid, and data entry.

The community in the Canterbury-Bankstown area will benefit from the SAS project through the maintenance of improved community infrastructures.

In honour of NSW HSC Muslim Students

The Lakemba-based Bayt al-Zakat Australia organisation on 26 January this year held its 5th Annual NSW HSC High Achievers' Dinner to honour Muslim Higher School Certificate students who had performed exceptionally well, in particular those achieving a UAI score higher than ninety.

After a delicious buffet dinner, the local Pharmacist Mr Ridwan Al-Metsalem was awarded as the Philanthropist of



Awarding Muslim Achievers

the Muslim Community for his outstanding support of community projects and orphan sponsorship overseas.

Mr Shawki Kabbara received the award for contribution to community organisations for his endless volunteer work with various Islamic societies in Sydney. Twenty Muslim students received the HSC awards, with the highest UAI of 99.85 achieved by Mr Mohammed Jebara. Besides the awards, each of the HSC achievers also received several gifts including trophies, watches and cash prizes, along with a copy of the Quran.

The Bayt al-Zakat organisation every year holds this event to encourage upcoming HSC students to focus on their studies; provide role models for Muslim youth; and allow networking opportunities for the high achieving students entering university.

For further information about Bayt al-Zakat please call (02) 97589077.

Words of encouragement and support

The events of the year 2001, which included the refugee crisis, the Sydney suburban gang rapes and the Sept. 11 attacks, have come close to literally destroying the very foundation of the peace, freedom, equality and democracy that Australia so eagerly promotes.

Ill founded media reports, xenophobic expressions and the general lack of ability of the public to differentiate between single events and an entire race and religion have left many Muslims with feelings of disillusionment and isolation.

Despite living most of their lives if not their entire lives here, many Australian Muslims were made to feel like outsiders because of the common occurrences of verbal and physical abuse. The good news is not all Australians feel that Muslims, as one Sydney columnist had implied, 'are the source of all conflicts'. In fact, amidst what seems to be and mostly feels like a deeply fragmented and divided society, there have been great words of encouragement and support from all members of the community.

Jayan H. (Muswellbrook): "Like all Australians, I was horrified by the terrorist attacks on New York last week. Like the great majority of Australians, I do not believe that outrage had anything to do with ethnicity or religion. As an evangelical Christian I want to assure you that every Christian I have spoken or prayed with does not blame Islam for this outrage, or wish anything but the best for Australian Muslims. Instead we are praying for you and will shield you with our prayer..."

"I want reconciliation between our great religions and respect your tolerance and belief in a 'fair go' for all Australians. I believe all Christians want this and we reach out to you with all our hearts – don't give in to fear, you have friends who care for you.

"God willing, all of us can work together to resolve this issue and see a true spirit of tolerance and love overcome human hatred and intolerance."

Rebecca Schofield (Warriewood): "I would like to address this note to the Muslim people of Australia in general. I have been appalled by the racist, ignorant, and reactionary behaviour inflicted against you since the attack on America occurred. This discrimination is totally unjust and ungrounded and deeply disappointing. As an Australian to fellow Australians I would just like you to know that I empathise with you and extend my hand to you during these uncertain times. Once again I apologise for the ignorant slander you have suffered and hope for harmony and justice in the future."

Lenore Blackwood: "One hears you receive many abusive messages. It is a fact that people who want to throw stones are quick to do so and people of good will often do not shout. So I am taking this opportunity to assure you that there are many, many Australians like myself who are appalled about what is happening in this country under this government. I lived in Afghanistan in the 1960's and I am deeply distressed by the treatment handed out to the Afghan refugees. I am also in sympathy with all Arab Muslims who are suffering at this time. I know I can speak for many others but we do not take part in talk back radio and our voice is not being heard. Please accept our good will."

Annabel Murray: "Thank you for speaking out in compassion for the innocent people killed in the recent terrorist attacks in America and for condemning these acts of violence. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT MANY PEOPLE FROM ALL SECTORS of the Australian society are thinking of you in these difficult times. Racist people speak from a place of anger and ignorance, not compassion and rational comprehension."

Joe Fay: "I would like to express my deep shame at the racist response of some Australians in the aftermath of the US attacks. I hope you will continue to rise above the racism and recognise the actions as no more than an impulsive reaction by a few extremists who will eventually recognise that their brutality is entirely misplaced."

Mrs C. Pollit: "I am just a member of the Australian public, but I know and speak for many, many others including my friends and family. I want you to know that I do not tolerate any form of bigotry or racism and that I have great respect for you and your beliefs as well as empathy and support for your people."

(Researched and compiled by Ms Fatima Sayed)

Welcoming the new Ambassador to Lebanon

A special dinner function was organised on Monday 4 January 2002 by the Lebanese Moslem Association (LMA) to welcome the appointment of the new Australian Ambassador to Lebanon, Ms Stephanie Schwab.

In a brief speech, the LMA's President Mr Mohamad Safi formally introduced to Ms Schwab the various prominent NSW Muslim community leaders, which included Imam Ali's Mosque Sheikh Yahya Safi, Islamic Council's Chairman Ali Roude, and Mr Omar Yasin.

The LMA vice president Mr Keysar Trad, who was the MC on the evening, had the opportunity to give the ambassador a quick rundown of the LMA's ongoing youth, community and settlement services.

Mr Trad also informed that the LMA had been involved in the briefing of Australian defence personnel before leaving Australia for overseas postings.

Ms Schwab was given a tour of the mosque and driven back to the city, during which Mr Omar Yasin took the opportunity to raise several issues of concern to the Muslim community, including Australia's sovereignty and the Middle East crisis.

The new Australian Ambassador to Lebanon wished the Muslim community well and was expected to leave Australia on 26 February 2002.

MEFF 2001: 'bringing Muslims together'

In a short address at the Multicultural Eid Festival & Fair (MEFF) on December 2001, the Chairman of the Islamic Council (ICNSW), expressed the Muslim sympathy towards the victims and the firefighters battling the bushfires, saying that the hearts and souls of the Muslim community were with the NSW Fire Service and that the Islamic Council had contacted the Fire Department and relevant Ministers to provide support and assistance.

In a reference to the Sept. 11 attacks, Mr Roude also said that the Muslim community had suffered greatly, indicating that whenever something happened somewhere in the world involving Muslim, or with suspected Muslim involvement, the Muslim community here had to endure various forms of unnecessary stress and hurt, and that the 'loyalty question' had always been raised.

He added that there was no doubt that both legally and on the principle of the Islamic faith, that Muslims were duty-bound to defend Australia, if/when attacked.

In conclusion, he thanked the organisers of the MEFF 'for bringing Muslims together' in a spirit of cooperation.

"That's what multiculturalism is all about," Mr Roude said. The Islamic Council also sponsored the MEFF's showbags.

MWA Upcoming activities

CLASSES and COURSES

The Muslim Womens' Association (MWA) is pleased to announce that a series of classes and courses for Muslim young girls and women have been organised for February-April 2002 at several locations including Lakemba, Liverpool, Macquarie Fields, Campbelltown and Macarthur. To be eligible to attend, you must be a member of the MWA.

Classes and Courses include:
English (TAFE) Intermediate
Computer (TAFE) Course
Floristry
Sewing
Arabic (Tajweed) Classes
Quran Classes
Childcare

For a complete list of these activities and courses, and for membership details, please call MWA on (02) 9750 6916.

SENIORS SPIRITUAL CAMP

We are pleased to inform that the MWA's 'Seniors Spiritual Camp' that was cancelled due to the recent bushfires is on again at **WISEMAN'S FERRY** during the Easter Holiday break in April. So if you are interested and you are Year 11 and over, contact us to confirm a placement.

SWIMMING and AEROBICS

Would you like to get fit and stay fit? Have you been looking for **WOMEN'S ONLY** exercise groups? Here's your chance. The MWA is organising **WOMEN'S ONLY SWIMMING** and **WOMEN'S ONLY AEROBICS** classes in the Canterbury-Bankstown area. So contact us if you wish to join. **Phone: 02 9750 6916**

HOTLINE

For any information regarding the Islamic Council's Scripture Programme please contact Sheikh Rafi Ahmad on:

0414 580 813

FEEDBACK

Letters, comments and contributions should be sent to the ICNSW's postal address.

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