

FROM THE CHAIR

We live in times that reap of technological prowess, modernity, and economic rationalisation. Everything travels at a more rapid pace than ever before. People seem to be more concerned with earning a living, rather than living itself. When one of the early Greek philosophers was once asked how he had acquired so much knowledge, he replied "People live to eat, but I eat to live."

Now more than ever before, individuals and society as a whole are in dire need of returning to their pure, tranquil origins. These beginnings are rooted firmly in the concepts of justice, equality, tolerance, and spirituality. According to all revealed traditions, man was created in the image of God.

As the representative of God on this Earth, it is man's divine responsibility to enjoin in God's attributes of mercy, compassion, peace, love, generosity, and justice. These are qualities that should never part from the essence of the human being. This is what Islam teaches. This is what our world needs.

In a Prophetic tradition, Muhammad (peace of God be upon him and all Messengers) says that this earth is our mother, and that she will bear witness against us on the Day of Judgement. We also learn from the Divine words captured in the Glorious Qur'an that the true slaves of God are those who tread lightly on this earth, showing humility to all creation.

So the message of Islam is one of inclusion. All human beings are viewed as guests who have been invited by Allah, The King, to His banquet. As such, we should treat each other with kindness in His presence, no matter what our faith, religion, culture, background or tradition.

Ali Roude OAM

(June 2002)

Somali Community Celebration



The Islamic Council attended a special evening function, organised by the Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta MRC and the Auburn MRC, to celebrate the achievements of the Somali community.

Guests of honour, Hon. Gary Hardgrave, the Minister for Citizenship, Mr Laurie Ferguson MP, the Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, and Islamic Council's Chairman Mr Ali Roude, attending the celebration were treated with a review of the settlement of the Somali community in NSW, an award presentation to the Somali soccer team and to the best floral arrangement, accompanied by entertainment and dinner.

The wider community had a glimpse of the good work carried out for the successful settlement of the Somali community.

Australia to become a police state??

The Chairman of the Islamic Council of New South Wales, Mr Ali Roude, said in a press release last month that the introduction of 'anti-terror' laws would turn Australia into a police state, targeting not only Muslim and Arab people but also the wider community.

"We have already seen ASIO in action even without the 'anti-terror' powers, raiding Muslim and Arab homes; confiscating properties and passports of people with so-called 'suspected' terrorist links.

"There should be no doubt in the minds of the Australian people that these laws when introduced would severely disrupt the daily lives of ordinary people.

"We found that these bills, using vaguely worded phrases, would empower the Attorney General to ban almost any organisation whether or not that organisation had previously been convicted or even charged with anything.

"The ASIO agency could simply come and pick up anyone, and hold them incommunicado indefinitely, without being able to consult a lawyer, and without the right to remain silent.

"The proposed laws go well beyond the model suggested by the UN to establish mechanisms to fight terrorism internationally.

"The Muslim and Arabic communities have been under extreme scrutiny and, in many respects, have been unjustifiably made to feel as outcasts and fearful of their future in a country which was, prior to the tragedy of September 11, a safe haven for a number of people who had run away from the sort of police state that now we see being introduced here.

"We are concerned about strip-searching, especially of children and women.

"The ALP is now all that stands in the way of Australia becoming a police state," Mr Roude said.

The Islamic Council of New South Wales would like to see all parliamentarians join the International Commission of Jurists to repudiate the proposed 'anti-terror' laws.

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Community Education and Development Services

Muslim burial land at Rookwood Cemetery

The ICNSW led a delegation, made up of various representatives, to hold talks with the NSW Minister for Land,



Hon Tony Aquilina to discuss the availability of Muslim burial land at Rookwood Cemetery. Several parliamentarians were also present, including State Member for Bankstown Mr Tony Stewart, State Member for Auburn, Ms Barbara Perry, and representative of Hon E Obeid, the Minister for Fishing. The ICNSW expressed the concern on behalf of the NSW Muslim community to point out that the existing burial site allocated for Muslim burial is now full and that, based on the works of the Muslim Cemetery Trust, burial will cease at the end of June this year. The Minister had promised that the matter would be followed up.

International Commission of Jurists

The ICNSW led a delegation to a specially convened meeting at Justice Dowd's Chambers to address, to the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), various issues confronting the Islamic and Arabic communities of NSW. Following discussion, it was agreed to prepare short working papers on each of the issues that will be discussed at future meetings. The role and participation of the ICNSW will consist of exploring ways of addressing the significant problems that the Islamic and Arabic communities face as well as the interaction of non-Islamic and Arabic communities with these issues. Also present at the meeting were ICJ's Chairman Steve Mark, Justice John Dowd, Mr Nick McNally, Mr Firas Najji and Mr Hassan Moussa.

Board of Studies

The ICNSW is taking part in the Board of Studies' preparation of the Higher School Certificate English prescribed text list for the 2004 HSC. At its first formal meeting, the Board Curriculum Committee issued a briefing to the Community and Expert Reference Group on the proposed texts and the methodology of consultation.

NSW Police Service

The ICNSW has facilitated the appointment of Sheikh Khalil Chami, the former ICNSW's Islamic Scripture Coordinator, as an honorary Muslim Chaplain who would minister to NSW Police employees. The NSW Police has an extensive statewide honorary chaplaincy program, which provides an opportunity for interested clergy to participate in the ministry.

ICNSW's Voice of Islam radio station

In the next seven weeks the **Voice of Islam (VOI)** will be on air again. Works are still underway to launch for a re-vamped radio station on the special band frequency 173.35 MHz. An estimated 5000 radios have been ordered from overseas and will be made available. It is expected that the programs will just as exciting as they were during previous temporary broadcasts.

Education Reference Group

The ICNSW continued to provide expert advice to the Education Reference Group that was established by the Premier's Department to address issues of youth and family.

Needs analysis/Profile

The ICNSW submitted to the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) a proposal on the needs and analysis/profile of the Muslims of NSW.

NSW Department of Education and Training

The ICNSW conducted a review of the 'Fact Sheets' on Racism for NSW Department of Education and Training developed for a web site [<http://racismnoway.com.au>] to assist Australian schools counter racism. The web site features information on racism for teachers and students, a guide for Australian schools, student games and activities, fact sheets and a range of activities for teachers to use in the classroom.

Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC)

The ICNSW is developing various strategies to work in partnership with the Belmore-based Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC). A number of sports and recreation projects have been discussed, and various applications will be submitted to funding bodies. The PCYC has a sizeable client base from disadvantaged groups and emerging communities from people of non-English speaking backgrounds.

Villawood Detention Centre

The ICNSW attended a lunch organised by member society the Suburban Islamic Association for refugees at the Villawood Detention Centre. A short talk was prepared and delivered by the ICNSW's Chairman Ali Roude on the occasion.

University of Western Sydney

The ICNSW and the University of Western Sydney (UTS) are jointly working to develop a policy on music, as required by the NSW Syllabus in Creative Arts Key Learning Area and that would reflect Islamic principles, for the teachers' education programmes at the university.

BRW: Race gets the silence treatment

A spokesperson for the Islamic Council, Ms Nada Roude told BRW that measures such as the discussion on the possibility of harassment in the workplace, especially after September 11 could be 'reassuring' for staff who feared they would be exposed to racism.

Ms Roude also indicated that this approach was a benefit for the worker 'by helping to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment, and for the employer, to minimise disruptions.

In its April 11-17 issue, the BRW ran the article titled 'Race gets the silence treatment,' which looked how racial differences in the workplace had become 'a big management issue.'

According to the BRW, many Australian companies had racial tensions in their workplaces and that often managers failed to realise there was a problem.

It also confirmed what was widely known by peak ethnic community organisations that since September 11, 'there had been a substantial increase in racial vilification directed towards people of Islamic or Arabic background.'

"The relationship between racism and business became public in January when the chairman of Fujitsu Australia, Neville Roach, quit his role as chairman of the Council of Multicultural Australia and the Business Advisory Panel on Migration in protest at what he called the Howard Government's hard-line and inflexible approach to immigration," said the BRW.

Roach reportedly said that a potential competitive advantage for Australia is being squandered, and that 'we are not taking maximum advantage of our diversity.'

Ms Roude also told BRW that managers 'should know about the backgrounds of the people in their workplace, so they can be aware of issues as they arise.'

Community Justice Centres' Ethnic Working Party

The Islamic Council is taking part in a working group to assist the Community Justice Centre (CJC) in its review of recruitment, selection and training policies and procedures, within the context of ensuring that they address the cultural needs and sensitivities of ethnic communities.

The Ethnic Working Party seeks to identify the existing CJC's policies and practices; to review recruitment, selection and training of CJC mediators; and to review and consider related alternative programs and models within the broader context of conflict management work with specific communities and special needs groups.

The working group is comprised of representatives of Attorney General's Offices, Anti Discrimination Board, CJC Business Development & Training, and peak ethnic community organisations.

Muslim Representation

Islamic Council of NSW (ICNSW) made several representations on behalf of Islam and Muslims in NSW to a number of specifically convened meetings to improve cross-cultural awareness and community harmony.

St Vincent's Hospital

In conjunction with the Plunkett Centre for Medical Ethics at St Vincent's Hospital, the Catholic Education Office organised a special forum titled, **Islamic Ethics in the light of Multi-faith Societies**. The ICNSW presented a paper titled Islamic Ethics to a panel consisted of representatives of the Islamic, Jewish and Catholic faiths, which was primarily targeted to teachers of Religious Studies in Catholic schools. The forum also identified a number of similarities amongst the three faiths, seen as important to a multi-faith society such as Australia.

Interfaith Prayer for Peace

The ICNSW also took part in an **Interfaith Prayer for Peace Post Sept. 11**, organised by St Vincent's Hospital

Bahai House of Worship

The ICNSW participated at an interfaith dialogue organised by the Bahai House of Worship in Mona Vale, during which the ICNSW presented a paper titled, **Sacred Places in Islam**. Representatives of various faiths were also given the opportunity discuss issues of concern to the their faiths.

Rotary Club, Turramurra

In response to the growing interest in the understanding of Islam and Muslims, the Rotary Club in Turramurra organised with the ICNSW a special meeting for the members of the club. The representative of the ICNSW gave a brief outline of the Basic of Islam, and also took the opportunity to answer a number of crucial questions relating to Muslims and the Islamic faith.

Shopfront, University of Technology, Sydney

The ICNSW organised a one-day tour to facilitate the visit of Professors Phil and Gwen Nyden to Sydney's Muslim centres, schools and the Muslim women's refuge. The professors were given an insight into Islam and the Muslim communities' work in NSW. The highlight of the day was a visit to the Rissala College in Lakemba. The tour was so successful that the ICNSW has been advised by the UTS university professors that they have decided to incorporate similar tour in their curriculum activities to increase the understanding of, and dialogue with, the Muslim community.

ABC TV Compass

The ICNSW facilitated the ABC TV Compass programme, 'Encounters with Islam' to showcase the Australian Muslim community in a documentary, which also featured the many aspects of the Muslim faith and how Muslims have responded to the fallout of Sept. 11. In a coordinated effort, the ICNSW provided the ABC TV access to various Muslim representatives and groups that were included in the documentary.

'Anti-terror' laws

The ICNSW prepared and issued a press release to reflect the concerns of the NSW Muslim community in relation to the government proposed 'Anti-terror' laws. The press release highlighted the dangers of the proposed legislation and how it would impact on the daily lives of not only the Muslim, but also the wider community.

The Muslim world Islam: a home of tolerance, not fanaticism

By Yusuf Islam formerly Cat Stevens, The Age, 20 September 2001

Media speculation since the horrific terrorist attacks on America has pointed the finger at Muslims and the Arab world, and that has meant ordinary citizens of the US and other Western countries becoming easy prey for anti-faith hooligans. Shame.

Sadly, the latest horror to hit the US looks to have been caused by people of Middle Eastern origin, bearing Muslim names. Again, shame.

This fuels more hatred for a religion and a people who have nothing to do with these events. This is why I want to explain some basic facts about this noble way we call Islam, before, God forbid, another disaster occurs - next time probably aimed at Muslims.

I came to Islam in my late 20s, during my searching period as a wandering pop star. I found a religion that blended scientific reason with spiritual reality in a unifying faith far removed from the headlines of violence, destruction and terrorism.

One of the first interesting things I learned in the Koran was that the name of the faith comes from the word salam - peace. Far from the kind of Turko-Arab-centric message I expected, the Koran presented a belief in the universal existence of God, one God for all. It does not discriminate against peoples; it says we may be different colors and from different tribes, but we are all human and "the best of people are the most God-conscious".

Today, as a Muslim, I have been shattered by the horror of recent events; the display of death and indiscriminate killing we've all witnessed has dented humanity's confidence in itself. Terror on this scale affects everybody on this small planet, and no one is free from the fallout. Yet we should remember that such violence is almost an everyday occurrence in some Muslim lands: it should not be exacerbated by revenge attacks on more innocent families and communities.

Along with most Muslims, I feel it a duty to make clear that such orchestrated acts of incomprehensible carnage have nothing to do with the beliefs of most Muslims. The Koran specifically declares: "If anyone murders an (innocent) person, it will be as if he has murdered the whole of humanity. And if anyone saves a person it will be as if he has saved the whole of humanity."

The Koran that our young people learn is full of stories and lessons from the history of humanity as a whole. The Gospels and the Torah are referred to; Jesus and Abraham are mentioned. In fact there is more mention in the Koran of the prophet Moses than of any other. It acknowledges the coexistence of other faiths, and in doing so acknowledges that other cultures can live together in peace.

"There is no compulsion in religion," it states, meaning that people should not be compelled to change their faith. Elsewhere it states, "To you, your religion; to me mine."

Respect for religious values and justice is at the Koran's core. The Koranic history we teach our young provides ample examples of inter-religious and international relationships; of how to live together.

But some extremists take elements of the sacred scriptures out of context. They act as individuals, and when they can't come together as part of a political structure or consultative process, you find these dissident factions creating their own rules, contrary to the spirit of the Koran - which demands that those recognised as being in charge of Muslims must consult together regarding society's affairs. There is a whole chapter in the Koran entitled Consultation.

Communal wellbeing is central to human life, so there is a concept in Islam called Istihsan, which means "to look for the common good". Even though the Koran may lay down a diktat, scholars are also supposed to consider the circumstances prevalent at the time. Sometimes that means choosing the lesser of two evils or even suspending legislation if necessary: for instance, a person who steals bread during a famine is not treated as a thief.

Once I wrote in a song, "Where do the children play?" Our sympathy and thoughts go out to the families of all those who lost their lives in this tragic act of violence, as well as all those injured. But life must go on. Children still need to play, and people need to live and learn more about their neighbors so that ignorance doesn't breed more blind fanaticism. Moderation is part of faith, so those who accuse Muslim schools of fostering fanaticism should learn a bit more about Islam.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Ruined are those who insist on hardship in faith," and, "A believer remains within the scope of his religion as long as he doesn't kill another person illegally." Such knowledge and words of guidance are desperately needed at this time, to separate fact from falsehood, and to recognise the Last Prophet's own definition of that which makes a person representative, or otherwise, of the faith he lived and the one we try to teach.

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Commonwealth Government Consultation: Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia



The Islamic Council made a strong representation as the head of the Muslim faith in NSW to a national consultation around the theme **Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia**.

As part of the 'Living in Harmony' projects, the Australian Government, through the Council of Multicultural Australia within the Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, commissioned the Australian Multicultural Foundation to conduct the consultation in association with Professor Desmond Cahill of RMIT University and Professor Gary Bouma of Monash University, two of Australia's prominent researchers in the fields of religion and multicultural affairs.

Representatives of the Islamic Council provided the views of the Muslim faith on the current and emerging key issues to the contribution of faith traditions to social cohesion and the knowledge base for use in combating ignorance and prejudice, reflected after the events of Sept. 11.

The study comprising of various elements was intended to fill a significant gap in the Australian Government's knowledge base for its multicultural policy, the policy intended to derive social cohesion from Australia's cultural diversity.

HOTLINE

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

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FEEDBACK

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

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