



PERIODICAL NEWSLETTER **DICID**

Doha International Center For Interfaith Dialogue ISSUE 2, FALL 2009



ALL READY FOR
THE 7TH ANNUAL DOHA
CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

All ready for The Conference

Dear reader, in front of you is the second issue of our periodical newsletter DICID. Through out vacation time and leave, our center has worked to the best of its ability to prepare and organize the 7th Doha Interfaith Conference. We expect dozens of guests from more than 50 countries to attend and participate as religious scholars, academics and all those who sincerely believe in dialogue. Since the Conference is knocking on the door, we are taking this opportunity to invite you to honor us with your presence.

In this fall issue of the periodical newsletter we mention a number of activities at the center. We'll also meet our neighbor 'the Anglican Church' in Qatar and Dr. Laude will present the first issue of the scientific journal, ADYAN / RELIGIONS, published by the DICID.

Dear friends, we heartily believe, that the work of our center will serve as a catalyst in strengthening the bonds between different believers, with an aim toward achieving harmony and coexistence in this part of the world.

H. Blekich
Head of Public Relations
DICID



Our Mission

We strive for constructive dialogue between followers of different faiths towards better understanding and harnessing of distinct religious principles and teachings to the benefit of all humanity, on the basis of mutual respect and acknowledgement of differences and through cooperation with related individuals and organizations.

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Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

Tel: + 974 486 46 66
+ 974 486 55 54
Fax: + 974 486 32 22
+ 974 486 99 00

P.O. BOX: 1 9 3 0 9
Doha
QATAR

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

DICID Visits Church Complex in Doha

Director of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Naimi, and Dr. Yusuf Al-Siddiqi, member of the DICID board, along with Head of public relations Mr. Hamdi Blekich made a visit to the Christian Churches Steering Committee of Doha in May. They received warm welcome by the council members of the Steering Committee; Rev. Fr. Tomasito Veneracion, Mr. Siby Joseph, Rev. Canon Bill Schwartz, Mr. Magdi Abdul Malik, Mr. Osama Ghawi, Mr. George Shahid, and others. This was the first official visit by the DICID to the Christian Churches Steering Committee. In a congenial atmosphere, they discussed many different aspects of interfaith dialogue in Qatar, exchanging views and opinions on a wide variety of issues. They also discussed cooperation between the DICID and Christian Churches in Doha regarding interfaith issues. Dr. Al-Naimi also invited Christian churches in Doha to participate in the 7th Interfaith Conference in October. After that, Fr. Tomasito accompanied the guests through the Church complex, showing the premises of the church. The visit concluded with all being served delicious snacks prepared by the church staff.



Interfaith Roundtable Discussion at Qatar University

The Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, in collaboration with the Press Club from the Department of Journalism at Qatar University have organized and facilitated a symposium entitled "Interfaith Dialogue, Issues and Problems" which was held in April, 2009. The roundtable discussion hosted a selected group of professionals, clerics and academics in this field, Dr. Yusuf Al-Siddiqi Member of the Doha Center for Interfaith Dialogue Board, Mr. Hamdi Blekich, Head DICID of Public Relations and Director of the Center for Intercivilizational Understanding in Slovenia, Father Makarios pastor of the Roman Orthodox Church in Qatar, and the Rev. Evangelical pastor in Qatar, Canon Bill Schwartz. Many students of Qatar University also attended the discussion. The speakers presented at the symposium interesting views related to the interfaith dialogue in the Arab world, expressing their views related to the issue, especially amongst the youth. Qatar University students also interacted with their opinions and interesting questions. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Alaa Al-Shami, professor of journalism at Qatar University, who expressed that discussions of this kind can help everyone to understand his fellow human being, follower of other faith.



HONORED GUESTS OF THE DICID

The US Interfaith Delegation Visits DICID

A small delegation of American citizens invited by the National Peace Foundation and the Islamic Society of North America participated in a people-to-people exchange program between the United States and countries in the Middle East, visiting Qatar last May. An exchange program which is part of "Faith and Community: A Dialogue," was established through a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the U.S. Department of State to the National Peace Foundation. The inter-religious dialogue initiative provides for unmediated exchange among clerics, scholars of religion, educators and community leaders, a group of eight guests visited DICID.

In Doha, they met with the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue staff, Dr. Aisha Al-Mannai, Dean of the Faculty of Shariah at Qatar University, the new Roman Catholic congregation in Qatar, and The Qatar Human Rights Committee.

The project was intended to enhance non-American participants' understanding of the practice of religion, particularly of Islam, in the United States; providing a forum for examining and discussing the compatibility of religious practice and democratic socio-political structures. It demonstrated the social benefits produced by a mutually respected coexistence agreement among religious communities and the ways in which Islam functions in the multi-cultural, multi-religious context of the U.S. This served to broaden American understanding of the place of Islam in non-American societies.

During their trip, the delegation also met with the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and one of the world's most important scholars of Islamic law. The group also met with members of the Muslim, Coptic Christian and Egyptian Jewish faiths. Delegates participated in a panel discussion with Islamic scholars in Cairo.



Indian Scholar Muhammad Karakunnu Visits DICID

The Shaikh Muhammad Karakunnu has sought greater cooperation between India and Qatar in interfaith dialogue. On a visit to the DICID, Shaikh Muhammad Karakunnu and Mr. Hamdi Blekich, Head of Public Relations, had an enthusiastic discussion about possible interfaith exchange programs between the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue and the Dialogue Center in Calcutta, India. Dr. Muhammad Karakunnu also suggested that other religions should be involved in interfaith dialogue besides the three monotheistic religions. Muhammad Karakunnu was born on 15th July 1950 in Karakunnu, Kerala, India. He graduated from Roudhatul Uloom, Arabic College in Calcutta, and served as a teacher in Morayur High School and Islahiya Oriental High School in Edevanna. He is the assistant Amir of Jamaat Al-Islami Hind, Kerala, Director of Islamic publishing house, Calcutta, and member of central representative council, Jamaat Al-Islami Hind. He has conducted many friendly dialogues with Hindu and Christian scholars of Kerala and authored more than 60 books including 14 translations which have won 5 awards for best works.



Interfaith Activist Talal Eid Visits DICID

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Naimi, the Chairman of DICID received Imam Talal Eid, Imam from Quincy, Massachusetts. The Imam was accompanied by Mr. Joey R. Hood, First Secretary from the Press, Education and Cultural Affairs Department at the US embassy in Qatar, and Mr. Lutfi Al-Mushriq, Media Advisor at US embassy. Imam Talal exchanged views and opinions on a wide variety of issues with Dr. Al-Naimi, and cooperation between the two countries and interfaith issues were reviewed during the visit. Imam Talal Eid was born in 1951 in Lebanon and studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo. In 2005, he received his Ph.D. in Theology from Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was the Director of the Islamic Center of New England from 1982-July 30, 2005, while also serving as the Imam of Quincy Mosque. Eid later became the Imam and Executive Director of the Islamic Institute of Boston. After the September 11 attacks, Eid visited many high schools, churches, and community organizations to combat the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists. On May 15, 2007, he became the first Muslim cleric appointed to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and is currently an Imam in the Brandeis University chaplaincy.



DICID Receives Ambassador of Bosnia & Herzegovina

The DICID was honored to receive the Ambassador of Bosnia, Mrs. Azra Kalajdzisalihovic, on Tuesday 14th of April 2009. Dr. Yusuf Al-Siddiqi, Member of the DICID Board met with Mrs. Kalajdzisalihovic regarding the DICID's upcoming Seventh Doha Interfaith Dialogue Conference that is due to be held in October 20-21.

Recently, the DICID sought the assistance of the Bosnian embassy in finding individuals and organizations in Bosnia that are involved in interfaith work and the ambassador was happy to oblige. Mrs. Kalajdzisalihovic also suggested some candidates that might be suitable to attend the annual conference in October from Bosnia and thanked the DICID for its interest in the steps that Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken in the field of interfaith dialogue.

RELIGIONS/ADYÂN

New Scholarly Journal Published by the DICID



Prof. Patrick Laude

Religions/Adyan is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in religious studies sponsored by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue and the College of Shariah at Qatar University with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relations between Islam and other faiths. Each annual issue is centered on a theme.

In a world of religious misunderstandings, violences, and hijacking of religious faiths by political ideologies, Religions/Adyan intends to provide a welcome space of encounter and reflection upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the journal suggests the reality of a spiritual unity in religious diversity that may provide the keys to both a deepening of one's own faith and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Qur'an suggests a commonality of faith and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity: "To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute." (al-Ma'idah The Table Spread) 5:48, version of Yusuf Ali)

As a refereed international publication associated to the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Religions/Adyan finds its inspiration in the universal message of monotheism broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broadly defined context.

Religions/Adyan encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present and potentially future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, Religions/Adyan wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationships between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also a way to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

Religions/Adyan targets academic audiences through religious studies programs and college libraries, but also interfaith centers, intercultural institutions, religious foundations and think tanks, as well as non-governmental organizations. Its emphasis is more intellectual and interactive than strictly academic.

The essays published in Religions/Adyan exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the DICID. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organization.

First Issue:

The problem of religious diversity, and its consequences in the form of religious conflicts and civilizational clashes between Islam and the West, among others, have been at the center-stage of international affairs. On the other hand, globalisation and information technology have made widely available an unprecedented amount of primary and secondary sources about world religions and wisdom traditions. This information has suggested to some, often in a hasty and superficial manner, the

possibility of the emergence of a trans-religious language of spirituality, as testified by the so-called New Age movement. By contrast, a number of contemporary collective identities have sedimented around religious concepts, and sometimes hardened into aggressively exclusivist, and even intolerant, movements. Hence the very pressing relevance of an examination of commonalities among world faiths, as well as the need for a clear understanding of the foundations of their differences.

The distinguished authors of the essays gathered in this first issues hail from five continents and a plurality of religious backgrounds. They address religious issues of commonalities, cooperation, oppositions and conflicts from a variety of disciplinary points of view, philosophical, theological, sociological, moral and political. It is our hope that this first issue will lay the foundations for a widening and deepening of interreligious efforts in view of a greater understanding of other faiths in a spirit of genuine attention to, and interest in, the diversity of religions and in view of peaceful coexistence.

Patrick Laude, Editor-in-Chief
Religions/Adyan





Doha
International
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Interfaith Dialogue

The Anglican Church in Qatar



By Revd. Canon Bill Shwartz

Anglicans have gathered for prayer in Qatar ever since Expatriates came to work here. In the beginning, friends met in home. Sometimes there were visits from clergy who lived in nearby countries, which gave a special encouragement to the various groups from time to time. Although the Anglican congregation in Doha has always worshiped in English, it is important to clarify that the Anglican community is not characterized as British. Many Indians, Nigerians, Americans, Malaysians, Indonesians, South Africans etc also share historically in the Anglican tradition of prayer and worship. In the last generation, as the expatriate population in Qatar grew with the blossoming economy, these Anglicans found each other and larger gatherings for prayer began to be held in a school. Today, there are four gatherings per week, two in Doha, one in Al Khor and one in Dukhan. In any given week, around 400 will come together in the tradition of prayer and worship, and to be strengthened by mutual affection and support.

I came to Qatar almost exactly two years ago, to serve this community of Christians as their priest, teacher, and spiritual counselor. I was especially encouraged to come here because the community has been given the wonderful opportunity to build a centre for our prayers and other Christian activities, thanks to the wonderful generosity of HH the Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and his government. In the early discussions I learned that His Highness's government intends that all Christians in Qatar will worship on the land given to the six Church identities, and that the Anglican Centre should encompass all of the Christians not already accommodated in the other five centres. In this context, the Christian community identified with the Anglican Church in Qatar has grown tremendously. There are now around fifty other Christian congregations comprised of people from different countries,

languages, liturgical traditions and denominations. All of these groups are working together to raise the funds needed to build the Anglican Centre, and work is progressing at an encouraging pace. In the meantime, we have constructed three temporary buildings to serve as a place of worship to be shared by the different congregations. So far twenty-five congregations share these small buildings all day Friday and Saturday, and every evening of the week. When the centre is finished, the various congregations will share twelve different sized/shaped worship spaces, designed to facilitate different Protestant traditions of prayer and worship. We expect that the finished facility will host at least 15,000 Christians coming to the centre to pray on Fridays, and similar heavy use of the facility all during the rest of the week. In this society so rich with international communities, many people seek out and socialize primarily with their own language and nationality group. Our Church community is the place where our shared identity as followers of Jesus supersedes nationality and language; it supersedes where we fit in the economic strata of society, and our prayer together reminds us of God's immeasurably inclusive love for all of the people that He has created.

We are conscious that we are guests in Qatar; that good relations between Muslims and Christians in this country have created special opportunities for us to share with the Qatari people in the privilege of building a prosperous and open society. We experience daily interface with Muslims from many different countries and traditions in all aspects of life: in the shopping mall, when we go to the bank – or to get our car fixed, when we need driving licenses or residence renewed, in taxis or in the doctor's office. Qatar is an amazing place where Christians representing the whole spectrum of Christian tradition can relate to Muslims representing the whole spectrum of Islamic tradition. It actually helps us understand our faith better as we experience the differing values that the two cultures represent.

The Christians affiliated with the Anglican Church in Qatar pray for the ruler and the people of Qatar regularly in our worship meetings. We rejoice in God's blessings which we share together among all of the residents of Qatar, and as guests of the Qatari people who are so hospitable.



WORLD INTERFAITH NEWS

New Church Consecrated in Doha



The St Thomas Syro-Malabar Church, the largest among the Inter-Denominational Christian Church (IDCC) members, was consecrated in May 2009 at Mesaimmeer, in the presence of thousands of faithful. The blessing ceremony was led by the Syro-Malabar Church head Major Archbishop Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil and Vicar Apostolic of Arabia Bishop Paul Hinder, who had flown in from the Church's homeland of Kerala, and the UAE, respectively. Archbishop of Thrissur Mar Andrews Thazhathu, Archbishop of Rajkot Mar Gregory Karotemprel CMI, ad-hoc priest and church construction committee patron Fr Jose Thachukunnel and others participated in the consecration event. Committee chairman and the ceremony's general convener Dr Mohan Thomas, IDCC chief co-ordinator Siby Joseph, Fr Simon Cheruvathur, trustees Antony Tholath and Johnson Antony and officials of various committees were among those who attended. Speaking during the ceremony, Mar Thazhathu described the St Thomas Syro-Malabar Church as a

symbol of hope for the migrants from the community. "The teachings of the Catholic Church has got a better expression in Doha with this Church," he said while expressing gratitude to HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and HH the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. It is one of the 22 sui juris (self-governing) Oriental Churches in Catholic Communion, under the Church of Rome, with its own particular characteristics expressed in worship, spirituality, theology and disciplinary laws. There are 26 dioceses in the Syro-Malabar Church across the globe, with 15 in India. It is estimated that there are more than 3.7mn Syo-Malabar Catholics. The IDCC complex at Mesaimmeer, which houses the places of worship of 28 different Indian Christian denominations, was inaugurated on March 28 this year by HE the Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy and Industry Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah.

Vatican Says Islamic Finance May Help Western Banks in Crisis

The Vatican said banks should look at the rules of Islamic finance to restore confidence amongst their clients at a time of global economic crisis.

"The ethical principles on which Islamic finance is based may bring banks closer to their clients and to the true spirit which should mark every financial service," the Vatican's official newspaper Osservatore Romano said in an article in its latest issue late yesterday. Author Loretta Napoleoni and Abaxbank Spa fixed income strategist, Claudia Segre, say in the article that "Western banks could use tools such as the Islamic bonds, known as sukuk, as collateral". Sukuk may be used to fund the "car industry or the next Olympic Games in London," they say.

Pope Benedict XVI in an Oct. 7 (2008) speech reflected on crashing financial markets saying that "money vanishes, it is nothing" and

concluded that "the only solid reality is the word of God." The Vatican has been paying attention to the global financial meltdown and ran articles in its official newspaper that criticize the free-market model for having "grown too much and badly in the past two decades."

The Osservatore's editor, Giovanni Maria Vian, said that "the great religions have always had a common attention to the human dimension of the economy," Corriere della Sera reported today.

Source: Bloomberg.com



Conference Dialogue



Interfaith Conference Held in Geneva

Under the patronage of Swiss President Hans-Rudolf Merz, an international conference was organized in October in Geneva within the framework of the "Initiative for Interfaith Dialogue" launched by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. Organized by the Makkah-based Muslim World League (MWL), the two-day event has brought together representatives from religions and cultures around the world.

The gathering in Geneva is the third of its kind. King Abdullah previously sponsored the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue,

held in Madrid in July 2008. The recommendations of those summits were presented in November 2008 at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue in New York.

Source: Saudiembassy.net

Preparations Under Way for the 7th Annual Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue

Preparations continue and arrangements are in full swing for the 7th Doha Interfaith Conference, organized by the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) this October.

Dr. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi, chairman, Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue emphasized that preparations for the conference are going according to plan, and stressed that the conference committee is holding continuous meetings and discussions with the centre's board members and the international advisory board in order to implement the plans that would make this conference, which is the seventh, a success.

Dr. Al-Naimi added that DICID is in fact exercising its role and responsibility towards society, state and the region in organizing such a comprehensive event. DICID is continuing to be the conduit for interfaith dialogue due to the support provided by the Qatari government.

Dr. Al-Naimi said that the DICID is well prepared to organize this unique event, due to the organising team, which is supported by highly qualified staff from both academic and professional fields.

The conference, held on 20-21 October with its main focus of, 'Human Solidarity' will address a number of themes and issues including:

- Spiritual Values and Achieving Unity & Solidarity
- Religious Responses to Natural World Disasters & Famines
- Religious Views regarding Human Solidarity in response to World Disasters (Wars)
- Human Action in response to Wars & Disasters
- Spiritual Values and Achieving Unity & Solidarity
- Religious Responses to Natural World Disasters & Famines
- Human Solidarity and Interdependence in Response to Humanitarian Disasters (Wars)
- Solidarity & Economical Interdependence; Religious Financial Systems Towards and the Economic Crisis
- Solidarity & Economical Interdependence: Religious Analysis of the current Economic Crisis and Its Consequential Problems
- Solidarity in Defence of Religious Rights & Freedoms
- Solidarity in Defence of Holy Places
- Solidarity & Economic Interdependence: Proposed Religious Solutions to the Financial Crisis
- Proposed Solutions for Defending Religious Rights & Freedoms
- Proposed Religious Solutions in Defending Holy Places

The conference will host more than 200 guests from 50 countries, representing the three major monotheistic faiths, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. A selected group of religious scholars, academics and researchers in this field will meet to discuss and establish common ground between religions and problems related to this issue.

