

Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports

Second International Congress on Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa: Developments and Future Perspectives

In 2006 the first International Congress of Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa was hosted by AwqafSA (www.awqafsa.org.za) and IRCICA (Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture www.ircica.org) at the University of Johannesburg. IRCICA, the prime mover and funder of this and similar conferences and congresses worldwide, has been actively promoting these platforms to bring academics, scholars, researchers, and other stakeholders together to highlight research outputs and findings that reflect upon the status and position of Muslim minorities worldwide. Since Southern African Muslim communities form an integral part of Africa's Muslims, it decided to host a follow-up event in the region.

IRCICA once again teamed up with AwqafSA, which had been in close contact with IRCICA since the 2003 Uganda "Islamic Civilization in East Africa" conference. For this congress, AwqafSA partnered with the International Peace College of South Africa (IPSA) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). It also teamed up with ITV, Radio Al-Ansaar, and the Minara Chamber of Commerce. Since UKZN was the main academic partner, the congress was held from March 4-6, 2016, at the Senate Chambers of UKZN's Westville campus.

The organizers' objectives for the congress were to (a) increase people's knowledge of the history and heritage of Southern Africa's Muslims, (b) strengthen cooperation among Muslim and African nations and their peoples by producing and disseminating Islamic and cultural knowledge, and (c) offer a forum for the true understanding of Islamic culture in the world.

Donal McCracken (acting dean of research, College of Humanities) officially welcomed the delegates. Following his opening remarks, the audience heard from the representatives of the Congress Organizing Committee. Zeinoul Cajee (CEO, AwqafSA), Halit Eren (director-general, IRCICA), and Shaykh Ighsaan Taliep (IPSA). Eren underscored the importance of these ac-

ademic gatherings and reflected upon those that have been organized by IR-CICA along with local and regional partners.

Immediately after their presentations, Suleman Dangor, a key member of AwqafSA's academic committee, delivered the keynote address: "Civilization in Crisis." In his talk, he revisited the definitions and concepts associated with civilizations, posited that modern western and Islamic civilizations were facing serious challenges, and alluded to the "Dialogue of Civilizations" proposed by world leaders. Dangor's reflections helped set the tone for the rest of the congress.

Papers were slotted into the following themes: transnational relations, religion and culture, politics and civics, literature and bibliographical studies, identity and history, endowments, heritage sites, and the media. Even though the event's sub-heading included the word "development," this aspect was somewhat neglected by the speakers. Nonetheless, the presentations and discussions were generally robust and vigorous.

The Transnational Relations panel consisted of three speakers. As the first one, Deoband Indian scholar Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi was unable to attend, Chair Muhammed Haron read a summary of his paper. Qasmi focused on the "Cultural, Religious, and Academic Contribution of Deobandi Diaspora of the Muslim Community in South Africa." Selim Argun's (professor, Istanbul University) eye-opening "Ottoman Engagement in Southern Africa" revealed to what extent the Ottoman Empire had been involved in African affairs as a whole and in Southern Africa in particular.

Canadian-based scholar Jasser Auda (executive director, the Maqasid Institute; newly appointed al-Shatibi Chair of Maqasid Studies at IPSA) theorized about the "State of Muslim Minorities and Prospects for (the) Growth of Islamic Civilization with Particular Reference to Southern Africa." His paper gave rise to some important discussions regarding the position of Southern Africa's Muslim-minority communities in terms of extremism and Islamophobia, among other challenges.

The theme of the second panel was "Religion and Culture." Umar Ahmad Kasule (International Islamic University of Uganda) discussed "The Reciprocal Influence between Islam and Bantu Culture: A Case of the Baganda Community (in) Uganda," and Edwin Salim Saidoo (University of Botswana) examined "The Interface between Islam and Tswana Culture: A Case-Study of Marriage amongst the Ngwaketse." While Kasule focused on death and burial practices, Saidoo looked at the institution of marriage. Silindiwe Zvin-gowanisei (University of Zimbabwe) gave a passionate account of "The Interaction between Islam and African Traditional Religion in Zimbabwe," underscoring the similarities between these two traditions.

The day's final theme, "Politics and Civics," was opened by Lubna Nadvi (political scientist, UKZN). Her "Leadership and Public Participation among Young Muslim South Africans" underlined the importance of youth playing a role in the public sphere. Nurudean Ssempe, a UCT-trained applied marine scientist, along with co-presenter Fatima Hendricks, emphasized the significance of "Rolling back Xenophobia (Project) through Community Dialogues." They shared their thoughts on how youth have positioned themselves to make critical interventions in community projects. Freelance journalist Fatima Asmal (co-founder, Institute for Learning and Motivation – South Africa) spoke on "Shakira Cassim: A (Relatively Young) Woman (Who Acted) against All Odds." This was indeed an insightful narrative of one person's participation in South Africa's civic affairs.

On the second day, former University of Johannesburg lecturer Ashraf Doocrat and the Muhammed Haron (associate professor, University of Botswana) zoomed in on Muslim literature and bibliographical studies, respectively. The former spoke about "Islamic Literature (Produced) in South Africa (That Acts) as a Reflection of the Muslim Community," and the latter focused on "Southern Africa's Muslim Minorities: Scholarly Research, Bibliographical Reflections." Both papers, along with the salient remarks of Chair Selim Argun, generated a fair amount of discussion. In addition to undergirding the need for preserving various types of written and circulated literature, they also stressed that these must be recorded in bibliographical compilations, for such records will contribute toward a better knowledge of Muslim "identity and history."

Independent researcher Haroon Aziz tackled "History, Contribution, and Challenge" by relating the input of numerous heroic Muslim personalities over the centuries. Anabelle Suitor (undergraduate research student, George Washington University) investigated the "Decolonizing (Process of) Islam amongst South Africans of Gujarati Muslim Origin." Haroon Mohamed (administrator, Ministry of Education, South Africa) pursued a "Case Study of a Cultural Co-existence Experience in the South African Context." His interesting presentation, although different from the others, evaluated a culturally mixed family within South Africa's multi-cultural context.

The thematic focus of the third session, "Endowments and Programs," began with Ugandan scholar Husein Mohammed Bowa's description of various aspects associated with "Awqaf Development in Uganda." Yousuf Cajee, a former South African high school headmaster, explored "Democracy and the Problem with Nationalization and Control of Awqaf Property," and Ghamiet Aysen, who heads a South African GEMS NGO, employed an action research approach to assess his "The Greater Edendale Muslim Society (GEMS) Program." Aysen's project raised many ethical questions.

The theme of this day's last session was "Heritage (and) Sites." Nezaam Braaf, who is working at the South African Petroleum Refinery and co-author of the paper with Ebrahim Rhoda, a retired primary school headmaster and independent researcher, talked about the regionally neglected issue of "Restitution of Muslim Heritage Land in South Africa." Rhoda presented a separate paper that unpacked the "politics" associated with the Shrine of Shaykh Yusuf at Macassar. Both papers underscored such taken-for-granted issues as "restitution" and the "building" of the shrine and the challenges that Muslim communities encounter when dealing with Muslim heritage sites. They were followed by Suleman Dangor, whose paper tied in with the first theme of transnational connections: "Natal Muslims and Their Relations with Muslim Countries in the Early Twentieth Century." He provided numerous examples that he had extracted from "Indian Views" to show the extent to which the province's Muslims have been intimately involved in international relations activities. Dangor's paper complemented Argun's paper, which was delivered in the first session.

The theme for the third day's final session was "Social and Community Media," a panel that led to a fair amount of discussion. Yousuf Dadoo (University of South Africa) reflected on "Muslims of South Africa from Newspapers to Social Media," Aisha Mall (Durban University of Technology) rhetorically questioned the "New Media: Sites of Contestation or Liberation for South Africa's Muslims," an Farid Sayed (founder and editor, *Muslim Views*) raised an important issue in his "From Survival to Sustainably: Can Community-based Muslim Media Meet the Challenge? The Case Study of *Muslim News* (c. 1960-1986) and *Muslim Views* (c. 1986-2016)." Shafiq Morton, a photojournalist and radio presenter, undertook a critical assessment of a community radio station in his "A Look at the Role and Impact of a Community Muslim Broadcaster, Voice of the Cape, 1995-2015." These complementary papers showed that South Africa's Muslim community are very healthy and have a vital role to play as they face the future.

Based upon the comments received, at the close of the congress the organizers adopted the following recommendations: to (a) continue to hold regular international conferences to promote research and produce new knowledge in those disciplines relevant to Islamic civilization, (b) consider the need for further research and documentation of the region's Muslims, and (c) take into account cross-cultural and inter-cultural challenges confronting Muslim communities.

In response, the congress resolved to (a) establish a research center that would mobilize and then house all archival, print, electronic, and other tangible/intangible materials in an archival library; (b) foster the integration of diverse

social and ethnic groups within the region; and (c) promote and support forums that adopt anti-racism positions and pursue anti-xenophobia projects to bring about better relations among communities both at home and abroad.

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