

Wisdom

The Newsletter of the Elijah Interfaith Institute

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News Update – First Meeting of the “Towards a Contemporary Muslim Theology of the Other” Project



View of Washington, D.C., the location of the Muslim Planning Meeting.

A decade of work by the Elijah Institute in interfaith dialogue and reflection has led to the realization that advances in interreligious relations must be accompanied by a process of reflection within religious traditions regarding their positions and attitudes to other world religions.

Several initiatives have been launched by the Elijah Interfaith Institute, addressing this need within individual religious traditions. As part of this broader project of encouraging theological reflection, the Elijah Interfaith Institute, with the support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, recently held a Muslim planning meeting in Washington DC. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together Muslim thinkers and intellectuals to lay the foundation for a future project involving the development of a contemporary Muslim theology of world religions.

Nine Muslim thinkers and representatives met in Washington DC on March 26-27 for the planning meeting. Participants constituted a good cross section of different disciplinary specializations, geographic dispersion and types of Islam. The disciplines of philosophy, law, history and mysticism were represented, along with particular emphases of participants upon sociology and on-the-ground community needs. Participants hailed from Egypt, Malaysia, Cameroon, the United Kingdom and the United States (including former Pakistani and Iranian scholars, presently residing in the US). Participants included Sunni, Shi’a and Sufi orientations.

The following is the list of participants in the planning meeting:

1. Dr. Adamou Ndam Njoya, African Muslim Congress, Cameroon
2. Dr. Hassan Hanafi, Cairo University, Egypt
3. Dr. Mohammad Azadpur, San Francisco State University
4. Dr. Basit Koshul, Concordia University
5. Dr. Osman Bakar, Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Malaysia.
6. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Malaysia.
7. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, American Society for Muslim Advancement
8. Ahmed Musawi, Al-Khoei Foundation, London
9. Dr. Vincent Cornell, King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Arkansas

News Update – Elijah Participates in The Art of Living Foundation’s Silver Jubilee Celebration



Director Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein delivering his message at the Silver Jubilee.

On February 17th, 18th and 19th 2006, India watched in wonder as 2.5 million people from over 150 countries gathered together to celebrate the Art of Living Foundation's 25th anniversary. Heads of states, leading international businessmen, prominent spiritual leaders, housewives, farmers... an eclectic and unprecedented assembly crowded into the 265-acre Jakkur Airfield and celebrated the Foundation’s Silver Jubilee and the 50th birthday of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a prominent member of Elijah’s Board of World Religious Leaders and attended the inaugural meeting of the Board in Seville, December 2003.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Executive Director of The Elijah Interfaith Institute, attended the celebration by personal invitation of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and had the honor of addressing the assembled followers with a message of solidarity and inspiration.

News Update - Elijah Participates in the Second Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace



Imams and Rabbis engaged in interfaith prayer at the Second Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace.

Following the success of The Elijah Interfaith Institute's contribution to the First Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace held in Brussels, January 2005, Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein was invited to participate in the Second Congress held in Seville, March 2006. The flavor of this Congress is captured in the following news extract:

Haaretz International

March 21, 2006-04-25

In Spain, rabbis, imams turn the other cheek for peace

By Shlomo Shamir, Haaretz Correspondent

SEVILLE, Spain - Only a thin tree separated the rabbis wearing prayer shawls and phylacteries from the imams kneeling on mats. The sounds of the morning prayers on both sides of the tree mingled yesterday as the spiritual leaders took part in the Second World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace.

The conference is a mix of friendly, if seemingly unlikely, interaction in the hallways, lobby and dining room, and occasional angry and confrontational reactions in the conference rooms themselves. However, the participants appeared intent on not causing the conference to fall apart, even when they were offended by comments made by colleagues from a different religion.

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Sharing Reflections - Muslim Theology Meeting Insights

Prof. Dr. Hassan Hanafi, Professor of Philosophy at Cairo University captured the predicament of the Islamic world and the essence of the Washington discussions, in a particularly poetic manner. He characterized Islam as "...our soul is in one century, our body in another. We need to bring them together."

Dr. Basit Koshul, Concordia College, characterized the question as follows: "...it is not as if Muslims have not worked out a workable paradigm of relating to other traditions. [This has been] part and parcel of Muslim history and identity. If there is one religious tradition that has explicitly recognized the legitimacy of and truth claims in other religious traditions it is Islam. The challenge for contemporary Islam is that the paradigm in which this acceptance of other religions has been historically expressed has broken down. The overwhelming majority of Muslims recognizes the legitimacy of Judaism and Christianity as "people of the book", and recognizes that we do not have exclusive claim to the truth. However, we do

not have the explicit formulation of a modern, post-colonial Muslim theology that provides us a conceptual framework in which to articulate this position. So those voices, that would deny the legitimacy of other religions, [which] have become so loud and dominant, have created a crisis for us that needs to be addressed.”

Sharing Reflections - Message to the Second Congress of Imams and Rabbis

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan sent the following message of support and understanding: “You know better than anyone that the problem is not the Torah or the Koran. Indeed, the problem is never the faith – it is the faithful, and how we behave towards each other. That is why gatherings such as yours, which bring together leading religious figures, both Jewish and Muslim, are so important.”

Getting Involved - Revisiting the Silver Jubilee

For those of our readers who wish they could have attended the Silver Jubilee of the Art of Living Foundation, we extend an invitation to relive part of the experience. For a donation of \$20.00 or more, we will be happy to provide you with an audio recording of Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein’s presentation/meditation entitled “From Past to Future: On the Spiritual Meaning of Roots”, from the conclusion of the Jubilee’s conference.



Aerial view of the Silver Jubilee’s participants at Jakkur Airfield

Donations can be made at <http://www.elijahinterfaith.org> or by sending a check to our administrative offices:

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