



# EDMONTON COUNCIL OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Vol 1

Bismilahi Rahman ar Rahim

## CHAIR'S NOTES

As Chair of the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities it is my pleasure to present, on behalf of the volunteer directors, the first issue of our newsletter. Members of the Board of Directors of the ECMC are appointed by, and represent the following Edmonton area Muslim organizations: Al Hoda Society, Canadian Islamic Society, Islamic Shia Ithna-Ashari Association, Markaz-ul Islam Society of Edmonton, Muslim Community of Edmonton, Ismaili Muslim Community of Edmonton, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Muslim Association of Canada and the Muslim Research Foundation.

ECMC has been in existence since 2002 and until now, the communication with the larger Muslim Community has been by word of mouth, via the internet and through the website [www.theECMC.com](http://www.theECMC.com). These modes of communication have not reached as many people as we had hoped and we find that many Muslims and non-Muslims are not familiar with our work. As the ECMC grows in strength and moves ahead it will no doubt have to draw on the strength and diversity of the larger community and we trust that this first issue and subsequent issues will help bring you up to date on our activities.

Muslims face many serious challenges, and one way of overcoming these is by communicating with one another and with the larger community. For communication to be successful it has to go back and forth and it is our hope that you will reciprocate.

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Elsewhere in this publication, we have described our mission, the focus of our work and ECMC's portfolio structure that has been developed to meet these challenges.

We are fortunate to have within this city a significant number of talented, well educated and resourceful individuals. We need you to step forward and help unify and strengthen our community. Edmonton Muslims have a tradition of being visionary and providing the kind of leadership required to see strength in our diversity and harness it for the common good of the Ummah and the Society in which we live.

Let us continue to build on this tradition. Future success of the Ummah depends upon our unity, our faith and our hard work. Step up and speak with an ECMC director or get in touch with us via email at [contact@theECMC.COM](mailto:contact@theECMC.COM)



**Directors**

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## Qur'anic Ethic of Love and Compassion, and our Responsibility

In our life as Muslims in both the Muslim world and the West, we must always remember the Qur'anic injunctions about ethics, love, and compassion. It is an undisputed fact that one of the main descriptions of God in the Holy Qur'an is "The All-Merciful." Divine Mercy comprehends everything, known and unknown, hidden and manifest. God is the all-Merciful that pours down His mercy into the heart of people in a number of forms: 1) Through revelation; 2) through rain or water; 3) through knowledge, and 4) through love. The Qur'an calls this type of mercy **Sakinah**.

Revelation is said to come down, to descend to the heart of the Believer; it is *Tanzil min rabb al-'alamin*. Water also descends to the earth. The heart of man is the locus of gnosis. According to one Sacred Tradition, God says: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the world."

The heart is the only faculty that can relate to the Universe and God in an effective way. Because of its centrality, the heart must be considered as above and beyond the mental, psychic, and emotional domains of human life. The Heart transmits the light of the Divine Spirit to the darkness of the human self.

Therefore, the heart is the source of vision, reflection, and conscience. In Islamic spirituality, the heart radiates with the love of God. God is the all-Merciful. As mentioned above, Divine Mercy is the *Sakinah*, which the Qur'an defines in very interesting ways:

*Strong belief grows in times of crisis:* "It is He Who sent down tranquility [*sakinah*] into the hearts of the believers that they may add faith to faith."

*Sakinah* is associated with the visible and invisible in human life: "He has made you the night that you may find tranquility therein, and the day to make visible to you."

*Sakinah* is associated with love and mercy among mates, spouses, or couples: "And among his signs is that he created you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect."

*Sakinah* is associated with the remembrance of God: "Verily it is with the remembrance of God that hearts find tranquility."

Therefore, the central question facing us is: How can we translate these ideal positions into our own lives? It is clear that this is both a team and an individual effort. It is the responsibility of each one of us to translate this in our lives and it is the responsibility of the society's institutions to teach all of these ideals. The Qur'anic ethic is a source of great inspiration and it provides practical guidance to all of us, women and men, in our daily social interaction. It is quite important to take the Qur'anic ethic into account.

I believe that the Muslim community in Edmonton and other places in Canada, which is diverse in its cultural and ethnic makeup, is in an ideal position to translate the Islamic ethic into practice. It is a fact that the ECMC (an umbrella organization that aims at advancing the ethical and social mission of Islam in a multi-faith and multi-ethnic community) is wasting no time to advance the ethical agenda of Islam, which is congruent with the needs of Canadian society in general and those of the Muslim community in particular.

In this age of globalization, the ECMC understands its mission locally, nationally, and globally. After all, these dimensions are intertwined and am happy to realize that the Edmonton Muslim community contributes to the well-being of the local and national society without forgetting the international dimension.

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**T**he Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities is a broadly-based coalition of Islamic organizations and communities in Edmonton and surrounding areas, based on the following core beliefs and values:

Affirmation of the Shahada ('La ila ha illallah, Muhammad Rasulullah'), the Tauhid therein, and the belief that Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) is the last and final Prophet of Allah (SWT); acceptance of, and adherence to, the belief that Islam, as revealed through the Glorious Qur'an, is the final message of Allah (SWT) to mankind and is universal and eternal; and that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), based on the commandments of the Glorious Qur'an, has prescribed and exemplified the noble rules governing spiritual and temporal matters; and espousing Islamic values of integrity, unity, respect, caring and sharing, in all internal and external dealings.

Based on the above core beliefs and values, the Muslim communities (collectively referred to as the Ummah) have come together in a spirit of cooperation and unity for the common good of their own member communities and organizations as well as the Canadian society at large.

## **Vision and Mission**

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**T**o work with the Muslim communities in Edmonton to help improve the lives of Muslims in the region and to enhance their contribution to society at large.

The Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities will strive to speak and act on behalf of Edmonton Muslims with fellow Canadians in a manner that protects, promotes, and enhances the understanding

of Islam and Muslims in matters of public policy, education, peace and safety.

## **Values**

In keeping with the Islamic traditions, the Council commits to promoting and upholding the following fundamental values:

- \* Humility, respect and steadfastness
- \* Openness in communication
- \* Non-violence of thought, word and deed
- \* Recognize, honour and value diversity (racial, cultural, and linguistic, etc.)
- \* Integrity and honesty
- \* Fairness and transparency
- \* Unity, teamwork and collaboration
- \* Focus on what unites us, not what divides us
- \* Respect for the autonomy of individual member institutions

## **Member Organizations**

The Council is currently based on representation from the following nine member organizations:

Canadian Islamic Centre  
Islamic Shia Ithna-Ashari Association  
Markaz-ul Islam Society of Edmonton  
Muslim Community of Edmonton  
Ismaili Muslim Community  
Canadian Council of Muslim Women  
Muslim Association of Canada  
Muslim Research Foundation  
Al-Hoda Society of Edmonton

Additional members may be added to the Council, as provided for in the Council's Constitution and By-Laws.



**Currently the ECMC has the following key portfolios whose mandate is briefly described here.**

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### **Communications**

This portfolio has two areas of focus:

**EXTERNAL FOCUS** - Respond efficiently and effectively to media and others in an appropriate, consistent, and balanced manner on issues affecting Muslims. To that end, the Communications portfolio will develop and maintain a website that can become a source of relevant and appropriate information. The portfolio will also maintain and nurture relationships with the media and through Muslim events and festivals raise awareness of Islam and Muslims in Edmonton.

**INTERNAL FOCUS** - Promote effective communication within the Muslim community. To that end, the portfolio will engage Edmonton Muslim communities and other Canadian Muslim organizations to share their issues, successes, and challenges. Activities that can improve greater understanding among Muslim communities in Edmonton and publication of articles within the Muslim press will be undertaken.

### **Education**

The Education Portfolio has two major objectives. First, it will seek to improve the knowledge of Islam within the greater Canadian society. It is committed to ensuring that Islam and Islamic civilizations both past and present are represented in the Alberta educational curriculum. It is committed to ensuring that contributions by Muslims are recognized by Canadians in general and Albertans in particular.

The Education Portfolio will strive to achieve this challenging objective by working with and making submissions to the ministry of Alberta Education. We are very proud of the fact that our committee has been successful in establishing the first Islamic Chair at a major university in Canada. This unprecedented

achievement is currently being emulated in other North American cities. The Education Portfolio will identify funding sources and organize fund-raising events to support the Islamic Chair.

The Education Portfolio's second objective is internal or targeted towards Muslim educational achievement. It seeks to encourage the educational aspirations and achievements of Muslims in Canadian society.

The Education Portfolio will seek assistance from existing Muslim leaders and scholars to promote the understanding of Islam. It will also collaborate with other portfolios within the ECMC such as the Communications Portfolio and with other organizations to develop appropriate educational materials and methods of supporting Canadian Muslim educational endeavors.

### **Interfaith**

The mandate of the Interfaith Portfolio is to engage in sharing and learning about our mutual interests with other faith communities.

The Portfolio maintains and enhances ECMC's relationships with various interfaith organizations such as the Edmonton Interfaith Centre, and other faith groups including the United Church of Canada, local Jewish Groups, Edmonton Diocese Catholic Church and the University of Alberta Chaplain.

We are also fortunate to be able to organize the celebration of Eid-ul-Adha at the Provincial Legislature as well as the commemoration of Milad-un-Nabi. The Portfolio will also be organizing a display of the essentials of Islam, at the request of Interfaith Centre and the City, at City Hall during the first two weeks of January 2007.

### **Strategic Leadership**

The Strategic Leadership Portfolio's main focus is to identify and develop leadership and talent that can serve ECMC and the Canadian Muslim Ummah at large. To that end, it will encourage through community – based nomination process, and proactively seeking out able and willing individuals to serve the community.



The Portfolio will therefore identify, nurture, groom, develop and train Edmonton area Muslim men and women to participate in all facets of ECMC work. These individuals should eventually provide new and expanded leadership for ECMC and ultimately for the entire Muslim community.

The Portfolio will also create a rolling three year operating budget for ECMC and propose fund-raising methods.

The Portfolio will also work with the Communications and other portfolios in identifying approaches to work cooperatively on selected priorities with other Canadian Muslim organizations to achieve greater strength and unity within the Canadian Muslim Ummah

## Public Policy

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The Public Policy portfolio is responsible for initiatives and contacts aimed at influencing public policy – and Muslim representation – at the civic, provincial and national levels. The portfolio is made up of both ECMC board as well as non-board members. This portfolio supports the Council's **strategic goals** through organized activities in the following three areas:

**Policy Representations** – through initiating and coordinating contacts with political leaders and policy makers in various issues of public policy, with specific focus on four **key policy areas** – namely, civil liberties, foreign policy, citizenship and immigration, and inclusiveness.

**Legislative Monitoring** – through monitoring the development or application of any new or existing legislation that may be of particular interest to the Council in the four **key policy areas**, and making suitable

representations to lawmakers and government agency officials as appropriate.

**Public Participation** – through encouraging and promoting participation of the broader Muslim community in all areas of civil society and public life, consistent with the vision and values of the Council.

The **four key policy areas** of particular interest to the ECMC are:

**Civil Liberties** – concerned with ensuring a proper balance between issues of public safety and security and protecting the civil rights of all Canadians, including Muslims, in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Foreign Policy** – related to monitoring the alignment of government foreign policy pronouncements, initiatives and actions with the traditional Canadian values as well as proper support for the United Nations and other key multi-lateral international forums.

**Citizenship and Immigration** – concerned with raising awareness of, and educating, policy-makers and government agency officials regarding any major policy or implementation issues of particular concern to the Muslim community.

**Inclusiveness** – aimed at ensuring appropriate participation and representation of suitably qualified individuals within the Muslim community in various civil society institutions, including public sector agencies, boards and commissions.



ALBERTA UNBOUND / LINDA GOYETTE

## Assisting in Afghanistan A local couple shows a better way.



**T**housands of Canadian soldiers have flown from Alberta to Afghanistan in the past six years to serve in a confusing war. I'd like to tell you about two Albertans who serve Canada's interests in the invisible Afghanistan where peace is possible.

Like most of us, Nashir Karmali has never worn a military uniform or fought in a battle. Raised in Kenya, he immigrated to Canada in 1982 and raised his family in Edmonton with his wife, Najma, a dedicated librarian. The couple decided early in their marriage that they would volunteer abroad as soon as life allowed it. Until then, they would do what they could here in Alberta.

A thoughtful and open-minded man, Nashir works as a senior project manager for Telus, but he is also an active community volunteer within the Muslim community and in the city at large. He was part of a team that welcomed Afghan refugees to Edmonton and established a chair in Islamic studies at the University of Alberta. He was also a founding member of the Phoenix Society, a group that encourages local dialogue among Muslims, Jews and Christians in the wake of attacks on Beth Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues and the Muslim Community of Edmonton mosque.

Last summer, Nashir took a three-month leave of absence from Telus to volunteer in Afghanistan and neighbouring Tajikistan with Focus Humanitarian Assistance. He worked with a community council in Afghanistan on education, youth and women's programs. He also mentored local people in report writing, offered board governance training and assisted with emergency preparation plans. Since his return to Edmonton, he has carried his laptop computer into small rooms around the city to tell people about his experiences and show photographs that speak of an Afghanistan we barely know.

It is difficult to reconcile the kites and roses in his photographs—and the smiling, bare-headed Afghan women on a picnic outside Kabul—with Canadian media reports that define Afghanistan with unrelenting pessimism. In contrast, Nashir punctuates his talks with Alberta references: a park that reminds him of Hawrelak Park in Edmonton; a landscape that reminds him of the badlands around Drumheller. He talks about four young Albertans, all Ismaili Muslims, who are helping an Afghan telephone company improve service.

Nashir does not dismiss or underestimate the security concerns in southern Afghanistan, or the threat of the Taliban. But he does speak forcefully for a different approach. If Canada

and its allies worked harder to help rebuild the more peaceful regions of the country, he says, civilians in the turbulent south would witness the distant improvements, and possibly work with the newcomers rather than regard them as dangerous intruders.

"You can't turn around a country without an educated population," he says. "You need to help them put food on the table while you provide education and skills training. You need to help them create opportunities because so many are looking for work."

John Manley and his panel advised the Harper government this winter that Canada should concentrate on aid that more directly benefits the Afghan people.

The federal government has promised to spend \$1-billion on development assistance to Afghanistan before 2011, but how impressive is that amount when the contribution is spread out over a decade? In comparison, Canada will have spent \$4.3-billion on military costs in Afghanistan by April 2009. Last year, our military costs were estimated at \$1.3-million a day. An Oxfam official in Washington told the CBC recently that the US military spends \$600-million on the war every six days, more than all of the US aid to agriculture in Afghanistan over the past six years. The Taliban have not been defeated. What exactly has this war accomplished besides death, grief, destruction and alienation beyond reckoning? Isn't it time to concentrate on an alternative?

Alberta is a wealthy province that can afford to spend far more on focused international assistance. Nashir Karmali talks about small, practical possibilities. "Let's bring Afghan students to the U of A for an education so long as they agree to return home after completion," he suggests. "We have over 1,000 Afghan refugees in Alberta. Let's pay some qualified ones to volunteer in their home country, and hold their jobs for them until they return here."

Nashir and Najma Karmali plan to return to Afghanistan and Tajikistan soon as volunteers. In village offices, and in one lucky library, they will offer the best of Alberta to distant strangers, the peaceful gift of their hard work. #

"It is difficult to reconcile photographs of kites and roses with Canadian media reports that define Afghanistan with unrelenting pessimism."

*Linda Goyette is the author of Edmonton In Our Own Words and the editor of the anthology Standing Together.*