

ICNA:

A Successful Journey And A Promising Road Ahead

By Zaheer Uddin



The presence of Islam and Muslims in America is not new. In fact, the history of Islam and Muslims in North America has been traced back to pre-Columbus era. But the history of Islam in America is not only a story of immigrant Muslims. It is also the experience of conversion of indigenous people.

The pages of Muslim history bear names of the scores who disappeared in the American melting pot. But it also contains pages describing the continuing struggles of Muslim Americans to define their identity and offer America a real alternative.

One of these pages is dated February 1968 when a group of Muslims met to shape an Islamic movement embracing Muslims drawn from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. This landmark effort which eventually led to the formation of the Islamic Circle of North America floundered at first as it confined itself as the Halqa Ahbabe Islami, an Urdu speaking group.

From 1971 to 1977, the Halqa worked in the shadow of the Muslim Students Association of USA and Canada (MSA) striving to recruit Islamic movement oriented Urdu speaking Muslims and to strengthen the Jama'at-e-Islami Pakistan. This was a limited but successful venture. It can be described as the second phase in ICNA's development.

The third phase began with the Annual Convention in New Jersey in 1977. A series of thought provoking and often emotional discussions led to changes in the course of the Halqa Ahbabe Islami. The name was changed to Halqa Islami Shumali Amrika in Urdu and Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) in English. It was declared that it will be an Islamic movement of this land and would be part of the global Islamic movement. A new identity had come into being. The workers were advised to take the message to non-Urdu speaking Muslims and to carry out Da'wah among non-Muslims.

In theory, it was a prudent decision. The intent was there but the action was missing. Soon the new organization was faced with a crisis in 1978. This seemingly difficult period soon gave way to enlightenment.

The fourth phase started during 1980-81. In view of the widening approach, the medium of communication was changed to English from Urdu. Da'wah work began to be undertaken under the name of ICNA instead of MSA. The new emphasis was on training Islamic workers. Soon the need for a central office became acute. A campaign was launched to recruit new workers

and establish units in various cities. The work among women was organized on national level in early 80s also.

In 1983, the building that houses the headquarters was acquired and the Central office was established in 1984. This marked a period of high activity. Up to 1985, a number of original and translated works that catered to local needs was published.

The fifth phase marked the founding of institutions. The first was the Muslim Savings and Investment (MSI) that was launched in 1986 as an Islamic alternative to the Jahiliyah financial system. The others were Sound Vision and The Message International, the monthly news and opinion magazine, and YMF (Young Muslim for Faith and Action) was established to work among youth.

ICNA carried out several other major campaigns and as a result of its leadership role during the "Rushdie affair" in 1988, it was introduced to both Muslims and non-Muslims, and soon became recognized as an effective organization.

The present and the sixth phase started with the beginning of 1990. ICNA Relief as a division was established in 1991 and two nationwide campaigns were launched, one regarding Gulf war and the other against the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. ICNA was also one of cofounders of Islamic Shura Council which was established in 1992, an attempt toward Muslim unity in North America. During this phase Al-Fala Center, ICNA Canadian Headquarters and Islamic Center school, was established in 1997 near Toronto. In some cities under ICNA or with the help of ICNA local units, Masajid were established.

ICNA's many achievements include:

- The successful introduction of the concept of Iqamat ad-dee in North America.
- Pioneering in planting the seeds of the Islamic Movement in this continent, and introducing the model of Sye Maudoodi's Islamic Movement.
- Assembling and training of a team of nonsectarian and dedicated Islamic workers who are striving and spreading the message of Allah in North America.
- Establishment of institutions that address the day to day needs of Muslims Americans. MSI, which provides Halaqat, investment opportunities and Islamic financing for homes and cars for Muslims; Message International, an alternate to Western media; Sound Vision which is producing and providing educational and multimedia products to children and adults; and ICNA Relief which serving humanity here and abroad.

In its journey, ICNA has committed some shortcomings. Because humanly work is not flawless and there is always room for improvement. Despite these shortcomings, there is hope for progress because ICNA is:

- A vibrant organization whose workers are blessed with immense potential
- The only movement-oriented grassroots organization of its

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unteer workers.

• Unique in its dependability, approach and methodology.

The Recipe of Success:

• Adopting Da'wah as its highest priority. Just not theoretical, rather develop a strategy by including movement oriented indigenous and immigrants, so that a united and effective struggle can be launched under "United Islamic Movement".

• Encouraging its members and workers to increase their commitment and spirit of self-sacrifice.

• Establishing new self-sufficient institutions that provide community service, generate income and help in effectively promoting the Islamic message

• Expanding work among youth and particularly integrating MSA graduates and English speaking sisters in Islamic movement.

It is a fact that no organization can flourish without fresh ideas; nor can expand without proper and new thinking. No organization can exist for along time without practical and new strategies. And without effective and dynamic leadership new horizons for the movement can not be opened.

Alhamdulillah, it is commendable that ICNA is among those rare Islamic organizations that welcomes criticism, even from within. It is such criticism and suggestions that helps organization to see within and to search for ways and means to improve itself in order to better serve Islam and Muslims.

Islam is a movement. There is no status quo and passive attitude in Islamic movement. If we want to keep our identity as Muslims in this melting pot; if we want to train our next generation as practicing Muslims; if we want to propagate and establish Islam in this society, we have to be dynamic and smart Daees. We have to be like a river, who makes its way through boulders and stones without stopping. Future is very bright for Islam in America. Let us say future of America is Islam, Insha Allah. But no future awaits anyone. Only that future can be ours that we dream of, and then strive to make come true.

Come and become part and parcel of Islamic movement – Islamic Circle of North America, and join hands to achieve the goal of establishing Islam in this world and having the pleasure of Allah in the live hereafter. ■

It was Great!

By Habib Husaini



It's that time of the year again, time for ICNA to have its national convention. This year the convention was held at the Baltimore Convention Center in downtown Baltimore, Maryland. As usual the next three days were filled with a variety of entertaining as well as educational programs. This year the theme for the convention was "Youth the Future of Islam: Myths and Realities". This year we were thankful to have so many great national and international speakers.

As usual the program was started with the Jumu'ah Khutbah from the Ameer of ICNA Dr. Muhammad Yunus. Dr. Yunus spoke about the youth and their importance in this Duniya and the fact that the youth are the future of Islam. During the first main session the mayor of Baltimore was there to welcome the Muslim community that had come out for the convention. The first speaker was Br. Altaf Husain who's topic reflected the theme of the convention the youth. The brother had spoke about the issue of the youth's Identity in Islam and the world today.

Many other well-known speakers were also there to share their wisdom and knowledge with us. Brothers like Imam Muhammad Naseem, Imam Siraj Wahhaj, Qazi Husain Ahmad, and Br. Zulfiqar Ali Shah who spoke on such topics as times of the Sahaba, Islam and dating, marriage and divorce.

Also there was programs set up by the youth for the youth, which can tell you better about the youth and the problems they face. ICNA's youth group (Young Muslims) was in full force at the convention. The National Coordinator of the Y.M. (boys) Br. Faraz Iqbal and for Y.M. (sisters) Sr.Mamoona Chaudhry had a variety of workshops and lectures prepared for the youth so they can understand their responsibility in this land.

The convention was concluded by a Muslim youth group known as T.M.Z. from the city of New York who put on a play for the parents so they can see the problems faced by the Muslims youth in this Western society and some solutions. According to many that attended this session, this production by the youth on The Future of Islam as the theme of the convention suggests shed some light to the some of the myths and realities of what the youth face today. This was then followed by closing remarks by Dr. Muhammad Yunus who was happy for all that attended and hoped it was a positive experience for all.

Some More Observations:

** Many people complained about the long walk to their hotels.

** Programs were for the most part ran close to the schedule, but the problem every year is that some of the speakers tend to go off the topic and leave the audience confused. This should be avoided in the future also the theme left many of the youth confused. Of course, the convention was not only for them but the theme made it seem that way.

** Many people liked the food this year and some did not. Overall it was great.

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