



MUSLIM AMERICAN ACTIVISM

American Muslim Alliance Hosts February Events on Both Coasts

The American Muslim Alliance, a national Islamic political organization with chapters in 25 states, is hosting major events on both coasts in February, according to its national chairman, Prof. Agha Saeed.

Members of its New Jersey chapters are meeting with New Jersey Governor Christie Todd Whitman on Feb. 14 at the Hanover Marriott Hotel in Parsippany, NJ. The discussion with the governor will be followed by an Eid al-Fitr program. The state of New Jersey has the largest number of AMA chapters.

The following day AMA national board members will move to New York, where they will hold a morning membership meeting on Long Island, an afternoon membership meeting on Staten Island, and an evening strategic planning conference organized by the NJ chapter at the Woodbridge Hilton, Islen, NJ. In addition to discussion of an AMA strategic plan for 1997, the conference will focus on intergenerational dialogue on issues important to Muslim-American youth. The events will be followed by a Feb. 16 national board meeting at the same location in Islen, NJ, the first since the AMA national convention in Westboro, MA last Sept. 14.

Later in the month, on Feb. 26, the AMA will hold a one-day leadership training conference in the California state capital in Sacramento. AMA delegates from Arizona, California, Oregon, New Mexico and Washington are expected to attend. Of a conservatively estimated six million Muslims in the United States, 800,000 live in California.

The West Coast training conference is designed to educate key Muslim activists, "the teachers of teachers," about the workings of the U.S. political system and state-of-the-art methods of community development.

The first session of the conference will focus on elections, legislation, appointments and lobbying. The second session will be devoted to community development, goals and strategies for 2000 and beyond, and organizational development—setting up an AMA chapter in every congressional district. Speakers will include former Oregon Governor Victor Atiyeh, the first Arab American to be elected governor of a state; assistant director Askia Muhammad Abdulmajeed of the California Drug and Alcohol Control Board; California as-

semblywoman Liz Figueroa and other state legislators; Julie Justus, appointments secretary to California Governor Pete Wilson; Nancy Michaels, appointments secretary to the speaker of the California assembly; Hassan Hamadani, a Bay Area poet and member of the editorial board of AMA's Web site, AMANet; Dr. Talat Khan, AMA California coordinator; and national chairman Dr. Agha Saeed.

Participation in the Sacramento training session is by invitation only. Further information may be obtained from the AMA head office: phone and fax (510) 742-1126; E-mail ama@hypersurf.com; or Web page: www.hypersurf.com/~ama

—Richard H. Curtiss



Attending KARAMAH's meeting at the Supreme Court were (l-r) Prof. Syed Nasr, Prof. Aziza Al Hibri, Asif-Quraishi, Prof. Ali Mazrui and American Muslim Council President Abdurahman Alamoudi.

Muslim Women Lawyers at Supreme Court

A recent meeting of the KARAMAH on the premises of the U.S. Supreme Court is an indication of the slow but steady coming of age of the Muslim community in America. KARAMAH is an organization of Muslim women lawyers for human rights. It is headed by Azizah al-Hibri, who teaches at the T.C. Williams School of Law of the University of Richmond in Virginia. The organization hopes to acquaint the Muslim community with Islamic, American and international laws as they relate to human rights and advise individuals and institutions with a focus on matters affecting women living in the United States.

KARAMAH is still in its formative stage. The meeting at the U.S. Supreme Court, which was addressed by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and Virginia Court of Appeals Judge Rosemarie Annunziata, was meant to introduce the organization to the American judicial community. This was followed by a day-long seminar at the graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, located in Leesburg, VA attended by scholars and students of Islam. —M.M. Ali

CAIR Launches Muslim Awareness Campaign During Ramadan

To mark the beginning of Ramadan Jan. 10, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) announced the publication of a first-of-its-kind handbook designed to educate employers about issues related to Muslim workers.

The 16-page booklet, *An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices*, deals with topics such as Islamic dress in the workplace, minimum requirements for Islamic prayer, Muslim dietary laws and legal precedents for religious accommodation. CAIR, a Washington, DC-based Islamic advocacy group, has been particularly active over the past year in defending the rights of Muslim women who have been fired or harassed at work for wearing Islamic head covering.

The guide, produced by CAIR's American-Muslim Research Center, also offers practical suggestions to help employers formulate diversity plans and avoid costly legal disputes. It can be obtained from CAIR by calling (202) 659-2254.

During the month of Ramadan, the group is also sponsoring an Internet Web site <http://www.discoverislam.com> featuring an exhibition of posters and writings called "Discover Islam."

—Geoff Lumetta

Islamic Association for Palestine Chicago Convention Attracts 3,000

Some 3,000 persons attended the national convention of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP) at the Ramada Plaza Hotel at Chicago's O'Hare Airport Dec. 27 to 30. It was the first national convention for the membership organization since a 1991 gathering in Kansas City. IAP also has participated jointly in three past national conventions with the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) in Detroit and other cities with large Islamic populations.

IAP, which was founded in 1981 and formerly was based in Texas, presently is headquartered in Palos Hills in the Chicago area, which has more than 300,000 Muslim residents. IAP President Rafeeq Jaber of Oaklawn, IL said the conference dealt with the religious and historical status of Palestine, the peace process, unresolved critical issues, U.S. Middle East policy and ways in which the U.S. Muslim community could influence it, and challenges and opportunities facing Muslim and Arab communities in America. Throughout much of the conference, both Arabic-language and English-language programs were conducted concurrently.

IAP General Secretary Sabri Ibrahim said the three-day program of morning, afternoon and evening sessions also featured regular prayer services, religious instruction, information on social services and citizenship obligations, and even talks on how to land a job and prepare for a job interview by Dr. Bassam Jodi and on the information superhighway by Hassan Al-Falo. Entertainment was provided by a male chorus. Al Najum (the Stars), and by youth and children's groups organized by IAP chapters in Texas and other areas, presenting traditional Palestinian dances and patriotic songs.

First-day speakers at the massive program included Dr. Abdulsattar Qassem, professor of political science at Al Najaf university in Nablus; Dr. Asad Busool, professor of Islamic studies at American Islamic College in Chicago; Usama Mohammad, editor of *Zaytoon* newspaper; community leader Dr. Mousa Yahya; Dr. Abdulazim Sediqi, professor of Islamic philosophy at Temple University in Philadelphia; Holy Land Foundation executive director Shukri Abu-Baker; International Relief Association executive director Khaleel Jassam; and Muslim leader Ghassan Saleh.

Saturday speakers included Nadia Elashi, wife of imprisoned Palestinian-American leader Dr. Abu Marzook; Ashraf Nubani, attorney for Dr. Abu Marzook; Mohammed Jarad, an American citizen formerly imprisoned in Israel; lawyer Rawhi Alshalbi; human rights activist Yaser Bushnak; American Muslim Council President Abdulrahman Alamoudi; Dr. Agha Sayeed, president of the American Muslim Alliance; researcher Ihsan Bagby; Dr. Abdullah Ibris, president of the Islamic Society of North America; historian and author Dr. Isa Nakhlah; Shukri Abu-Baker; and chairman Qayser Aldeen of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago.

Sunday speakers included former Illinois Congressman Paul Findley; Prof. Sami Alarian of the University of Florida; Dr. Mohammed Nimer of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) in Washington, DC; and Richard H. Curtiss, editor of the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*.

IAP, which is planning to hold its 1997 national convention in Chicago, can be contacted at 10661 S. Roberts Rd., Suite 202, Palos Hills, IL 60465; tel. (708) 974-3380; fax (708) 974-3389; e-mail: Iapinfo@iap.org; Web site: www.iap.org —Richard H. Curtiss

MAYA's Marvelous Month: Three Regional Conventions in December

The 22-year-old Kansas City, KS-based national organization that used to be called the Muslim Arab Youth Association outgrew its name when it branched out into programs serving people of all ages in the Muslim communities of North America. Now known as MAYA, the organization

also has outgrown its former practice of bringing Islamic families from all over the United States to one centrally located metropolis for a national convention during the December period when most U.S. businesses and offices shut down for Christmas and New Year holidays.

In December 1996, for the first time, MAYA held three regional conventions, from Dec. 20 to 23 in Dayton, OH and from Dec. 27 to 30 in Somerset, NJ and Los Angeles, CA. The results, according to MAYA executive director Mohammad Badawi, were spectacular turnouts of between 2,000 and 3,000 participants at each of the three conference sites. The innovative idea of bringing MAYA's services and speakers simultaneously to Muslims in such widely scattered areas succeeded thanks to a corps of volunteers assisting chapter presidents and convention managers Mohammad Al Haider and Ibrahim Al-Hayek in Dayton, Ahmed Shedeed and Yasser El-Menshawi in New Jersey, and Ahmed Azzam in Los Angeles. Participants enjoyed the convenience of being able to reach the conventions by automobile instead of having to buy expensive air tickets, and costs of transporting speakers were reduced.

In fact it seemed to this writer that the only people inconvenienced by this bold outreach program were staff members of institutions and foundations and of the dozens of private firms, many of them basically family operations, who regularly participate in the colorful "souqs" that are an integral part of the national conventions of nearly all Muslim-American and Arab-American organizations. Small groups were stretched to the limit to provide representation at all three MAYA conclaves, and a convention of the Islamic Association for Palestine being held simultaneously in Chicago.

MAYA's purpose, according to executive director Mohamad Al Badawi in Kansas City, is to reinforce the Islamic identity of Muslims in the United States, to help families live a Muslim life in a non-Muslim environment, to provide access for North American Islamic communities to Muslim scholars from overseas, and to identify and encourage Muslim volunteers to provide needed community services.

The evolution of MAYA conventions parallels the changes in Islamic communities in the United States, director Al Badawi points out. Proceedings in the initial conventions were in Arabic. After a few years a few sessions, primarily built around representatives of U.S. government and social service agencies and elected officials, were held in English. In all of the current conventions parallel Arabic-language and English-language programs were held, with older generations making up most of the audiences for Arabic speakers, and the second generation making up much of the audience

attending the English-language programs.

"In 10 years the programs will be largely in English," Al Badawi predicted. "with Arabic-language programs the exception." Speaker lists from all three conferences are too lengthy to reproduce in this article. However, a sampling of speakers and subjects from the New Jersey program provide an idea of the mix of religion, history, practical advice and politics provided at MAYA conventions.

They included the opening session with MAYA president Dr. M. Ashmawi; a media workshop by Ibrahim Hooper of the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR); *Fiqh Al-Ibadat* with Dr. Mohamad Adam El Sheikh; *Understanding Shariah* with Dr. Jamal Badawi; *Misinformation about Islamic History* with Ihsan Surriyya Sirma; *How Muslims Can Influence American Politics* with Shakir Elsayed, Paul Findley and Richard H. Curtiss; *Inculcating Islamic Identity in our Children* with Shakir Elsayed; *Indispensible Fiqh for Solving our Disputes* with Hamed Ghazaly; *the Promise of Allah with Sister Khider Lawrence*; *the Fiqh of Political Participation* with Dr. Ihsan Bagby; *Islam and the Concept of Tarbia* with Dr. Reda Basheer; *Introduction to Shariah* with Hamed Ghazali; *Islam and the Intellectual Challenge* with Dr. Jeffrey Lang; *Lessons from Fiqh Al-Sirah* with Imam Muhammed El-Hilali; *Intercultural Marriage with Sister Aminah Assilmi*; *Islam and the Process of Dynamic Change* with Ahmed Amro; and *Is it Love or Control?* with Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed El-Kadi.

Further information about the year-round services and programs offered by this national Islamic organization and the addresses of local chapters may be obtained from MAYA, P.O. Box 6765, Kansas City, KS 66106, telephone 1 (800) 462-6292.

—Richard H. Curtiss



HUMAN RIGHTS

Activists for Iraqi Children Crash Albright's Party

Five human rights activists made sure the confirmation of Madeleine Albright as secretary of state didn't go completely unchallenged Jan. 8 by voicing their opposition to United Nations sanctions against Iraq. Members of the group Voices in the Wilderness interrupted Albright's confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by holding up signs and shouting. "One-half-million Iraqi children have died because of U.S./U.N. sanctions. You could do so much."

Members of the Chicago-based organization dedicated to ending the sanctions pled for Albright and Congress to end the