



New Scholarships Widen Access to Oxford

The Centre has agreed to collaborate with the University of Oxford in the provision of scholarships for students to read for undergraduate and graduate degrees. To be known collectively as The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies Scholarships, these awards will be available to students able to demonstrate academic excellence and the benefits of their course of study to the Muslim world. Scholarships will be awarded to postgraduate students from developing countries in Asia and Africa and to postgraduate or undergraduate students from Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

The awards are intended for students undertaking study in any field in the humanities, arts or social sciences which is derived from or of relevance to the Islamic tradition.

The provision of these scholarships has been made possible by the generous support of a number of benefactors. Pre-eminent among these is Sir Gulam Noon,



Oxford skyline

business leader and philanthropist, who has provided a major endowment through the Noon Foundation, which supports a range of educational and charitable activities.

The scholarship scheme will be initiated in the academic year starting October 2009. Further details may be obtained from the Centre's website www.oxcis.ac.uk.

President of Slovenia lectures on: Europe and Islam: Coexistence or Integration



President Danilo Türk delivering his lecture

The President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, presented a well-received lecture on 'Europe and Islam: Coexistence or Integration?' to a capacity audience at the University's Examination Schools. In his lecture, President Türk spoke about the varied experiences of Europe's minority groups.

While noting that Europe as a whole has had little experience of mass migrations, each country has had specific encounters with immigrants from different countries. There was a need for frank and open discussions about the impact of these arrivals on the majority population while appreciating the needs of the minority groups.

Dr Türk stated that the main elements of immigration policy should be stimulation of entrepreneurship among minority groups; provision of access to education at all levels in order to ensure equal opportunities; respect for the religious needs of Muslim minority communities; and measures to ensure a robust anti-discrimination policy in the workplace.

The President concluded by calling for a more tolerant and inclusive dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Europe. A lively discussion, chaired by Sir Adam Roberts, followed after which, the Director of the Centre hosted a dinner in honour of the President.

Seminars

History, Politics and Culture in the Islamic World

The Centre organized a series of seminars on the history, politics and culture of the Islamic world.

Professor George Joffé, spoke on the Middle East as it might look in 2009. Professor Joffé painted a scenario in which the region would have to contend with global economic challenges alongside domestic issues such as population pressure.

Professor F. Robinson, Sultan of Oman Fellow, addressed the theme *Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam* and offered a wide ranging historical analysis of contemporary social and intellectual trends in the Muslim world.

Dr Amira Bennison of the University of Cambridge presented a paper on political power and the urban landscape in Muslim societies. Her lecture provided a survey of urban planning dynamics between the Umayyads and Almohads in Spain.

Teaching

The Centre's programme of Arabic tuition has been expanded in response to increasing demand. It now offers three levels of tuition in the language at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Open to the general public, these courses are accredited by the University's Department of Continuing Education. Further details are available on the Centre's website www.oxcis.ac.uk.

Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell lectures on: Muslim Contributions to Britain



Sir Gus O'Donnell speaking at the Centre

Centre on 'The Economic Contributions of Muslims to British Society.' He outlined the financial challenge posed by the current global economic crises and provided details of the Government's handling of the situation.

Sir Gus emphasized the importance of leadership by the business community

The Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service, Sir Gus O'Donnell, delivered a lecture at the

and the increasing contribution by ethnic minorities in this area. Many of the most successful examples of such leadership come from the Muslim community and there were many further opportunities for this welcome contribution.

Sir Gus explained that the purpose of new policies by the Government was to provide the necessary support for young people to gain the benefits of vocational education and training and, as a result, a wider choice of career opportunities. In this context, he noted that the employment of Muslim women was below the national average, and hoped that the new policies would address this by widening access to job opportunities.

Examining Islamic Finance

The Centre organized a lecture on derivatives in Islamic finance by Dr Andreas Jobst, from the Monetary and Capital Markets Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Washington, D.C. In a well received lecture Dr Jobst explained the rationale behind derivatives and the market context which has driven their development. Noting that in recent months conventional capital financial markets had become more expensive and prices more volatile, Dr Jobst outlined how the Islamic finance industry is witnessing dramatic growth with average annual growth rates of up to 15%. Approximately \$800 billion of deposits and

investments are held in Islamic banks, mutual funds, insurance schemes and Islamic branches of conventional banks. Dr Jobst also gave an overview of the basic concepts of Islamic finance and provided examples of how Islamic financial products can be structured. He noted the variations in the interpretation, recognition and enforcement of Islamic legal opinions regarding derivatives and other financial product innovations. He emphasised the importance of developing a clearly understood and standardized language which would facilitate communication and debate about the theory and practice of Islamic finance.

KFAS Fellow Appointed



Dr Afifi Al-Akiti

The Centre has appointed Dr Afifi Al-Akiti to the KFAS Fellowship in Islamic Studies. As a Clarendon Scholar at the University of Oxford, Dr Al-Akiti received his D.Phil in Medieval Arabic Thought. His thesis identifies and systematically considers for the first time a group of philosophical writings, called the *Madnun* corpus, attributed to Islam's greatest theologian, al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111). This scholarship was based on a painstaking

survey of nearly 50 medieval Arabic manuscripts. Trained as a theologian and philologist in both Islamic and Western traditions, in addition to his duties as KFAS Fellow Dr Al-Akiti is the Islamic Centre Lecturer at the Faculty of Theology, and Lecturer in World Religions at Worcester College, University of Oxford. The KFAS Fellowship, established with the support of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, enhances the contribution of the Centre to teaching and research supervision at the University of Oxford.

Ditchley Park Conference

Islam and Environment

At the suggestion of its Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, the Centre organized a conference on "Islam and the Environment" which was held at Ditchley Park during the weekend 17th – 19th October 2008. It was attended by religious leaders, scientists, scholars and environmental experts and policy makers from a wide range of countries (Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, US, UK, Yemen), and representatives from international agencies including the United Nations and the World Bank.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to consider ways of encouraging knowledge of Islamic teaching about man's responsibility for the natural environment and translating this greater awareness into practical action.

This objective was explored in three main areas of discussion: Islamic teaching and environmental ethics; the cultural context and social consequences of environmental change; and the impact of economy and technology on environmental issues.

Identity and Multi-culturalism

A round-table discussion on 'Identity and Multi-Culturalism' benefited from the participation of HE Mr Zainal Abidin Rasheed, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. Given the diverse mix of their national populations, Singapore and Britain have much to learn from each other. Mr Rasheed has a long-standing interest in promoting the role of educational institutions in the encouragement of mutual understanding between different communities. Comparisons between Singapore and Britain concerning issues of identity and belonging in their respective multi-cultural societies are apt. It was agreed that cooperation between the Centre and institutions in Singapore should be encouraged.



HE Mr Z.A. Rasheed



Participants at Ditchley

The principal conclusions of these discussions were that Islamic teaching does provide the religious and moral foundations of a rigorous environmental ethic and that there should be follow-up actions to increase awareness of this to secure practical benefits. Key proposals included: the establishment of an endowment to support research and agreed programmes of action; collaboration between the Centre and appropriate institutions among those represented at the conference; and initiation of a global forum, to perpetuate, extend and implement the policies agreed at the Ditchley conference.

Human Development in the Gulf

An opportunity to explore the rapid advances being made in human development in the Sultanate of Oman was provided by the visit of HE Rawya bint Saud Al-Busaidi, Minister of Higher Education of that country. Dr Rawya, an Oxford alumna, outlined the priority policies of her Ministry for the future growth of higher education in the Oman and of its international exchange programmes with overseas centres of learning. The Minister welcomed the existing links with the Centre and explored ways of enhancing these in the future. HE Mr Hussain Abdulatif, Ambassador of Oman to the United Kingdom, accompanied Dr Rawya during her visit to Oxford.



HE Dr Rawya bint Saud Al-Busaidi

Outreach

The Centre received Mr Richard Le Baron, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the United States Embassy in London. He met Centre Fellows and was given a briefing on the work of the institution. Minister Le Baron welcomed the cooperative academic links that exist between the Centre and universities and scholars in the USA.

Leadership Programmes

Dr Basil Mustafa, Nelson Mandela Fellow at the Centre, has been assisting Oxford University's Said Business School with their Executive Leadership Programme. He recently participated in a workshop organized in the United Arab Emirates to provide training to civil servants in Abu Dhabi.

The Centre is organizing its annual Young Muslim Leadership Programme, to be held in July 2009. This initiative, now in its fourth year, encourages young men and women from across Britain to become more involved in public life.

French Honour

Dr Ahmed Gunny, a Senior Associate Member of the Centre has been awarded the 'Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques' by the French Prime Minister. Dr Gunny was praised for his 'remarkable university career and the services rendered for many years in promoting the diffusion of French language and culture'.

Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Managing and Celebrating Diversity



HE Mr Kamalesh Sharma speaking at the Schools

HE Mr Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, delivered the Centre's Commonwealth Lecture to a capacity audience at the University Examination Schools.

In his lecture on the theme of 'Managing and Celebrating Diversity', the Secretary-General emphasized the connections between all faith traditions and suggested that they "are repositories not only of practices and beliefs

specific to them but of human wisdom." In that wisdom was to be found a respect for diversity. It was awareness of this respect which needed to be brought forward in this increasingly globalized world. Mr Sharma warned of the dangers of placing people into labelled boxes because identity was, and often is, complex and varied. It was important to educate people about diversity and he spoke of the need for grassroots initiatives that could provide positive images to young people about the community in which they live.

The Secretary-General emphasized the unique role which the Commonwealth could play in encouraging such initiatives. By working together on a voluntary basis its member countries seek to encourage a better understanding of the diverse traditions and cultures which together form the Commonwealth. This working together requires regular dialogue, mutual respect, and a conscious effort to understand what is of importance to others – whatever our regional origins or cultural traditions. Professor Andrew Hurrell, Montague Burton Professor of International Relations, thanked the Secretary-General and chaired the ensuing discussion.