



Contemporary Issues in the Arab World: Centre's Autumn Seminar Series

In Michaelmas Term the Centre hosted a series of seminars on the "Arab Spring".

The series started with a seminar led by Sir Geoffrey Adams, Political Director in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who spoke of the challenges facing Government in reacting to fast moving events. He argued in particular that, contrary to much comment, the events were, in general terms, foreseen, that they reflected fundamental economic and political issues in the countries concerned and that, with due account taken of the diversity of the circumstances, the Government had tried to take a consistent, positive approach to demand for democratic change.

HE Mr Mohamed Benaissa, Visiting Fellow and a former Foreign Minister of Morocco, spoke of the ways in which HM The King had responded to the new situation in the context of Morocco. He also called for urgent reforms to modernise the Arab League and equip it to cope with a new set of opportunities and risks.

The Director for the Middle East and North Africa in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Dr Christian Turner, provided a second perspective from within government and the audience appreciated in particular his insights into the pressures, and complex

issues, facing policy makers under the unyielding spotlight of media attention.

Sir John Holmes, Director of the Ditchley Foundation, added his own reflections on the difficult foreign policy choices that, in particular Western, governments had faced, aware of the continuing risk of unintended consequences if perceived to interfere.

Lord Williams, until recently UN Special Representative in Lebanon, added a Beirut perspective on events from his wide experience in the Arab world.

A recurrent theme was the value to both parties of bringing together academics and foreign policy practitioners to debate contemporary issues.



Trustee's Annual Meeting



The Trustees of the Centre at Ditchley Park

The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees was held in September in Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire. The Board visited the site of the new building to view the progress achieved in construction over the past year and later

reviewed plans for next year's phase of construction and the timetable for completion. Their discussion also covered all aspects of the Centre's academic work, and future plans, and the Board noted a positive increase in activity in many different areas.

The Centre is now supporting almost 30 graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Oxford, through its various scholarship schemes. Additional fellowships have been endowed, which will enable the Centre to recruit further academic staff to strengthen its programmes of teaching and research. The Board reviewed the Centre's administrative and staff requirements.

The Trustees noted additions to its Distinguished Lecture Series, with, in the course of the year, lectures by the President of Turkey, HE Mr Abdullah Gul, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, HE Dato' Seri Najib Razak, and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, HE Shaikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani.

Visiting Fellows

Two Chevening Visiting Fellowships have been awarded during the current academic year:

HE Mr Mohamed Benaissa is the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Secretary General of The Assilah Forum Foundation, Morocco.

Professor Meruert Abusseitova is the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Kazakhstan.

Other Visiting Research Fellowships have been awarded to the following:

Dr Mehrdad Fallahzadeh is an Associate Researcher at Uppsala University, Department of Linguistics and Philology, Sweden. His research interests include History, Music Theory, Iranian Languages, Islamic Art and Culture.

Mr Ismail Cebeci from Marmara University, Istanbul, is conducting research in the fields of Islamic law and finance, specifically *fiqh al-muamalat*, transaction types in Islamic economics, *fatwa* in modern *muamalat*, and Ottoman *fatwas*.

Dr Seyed Shahabedin Mesbahi from the University of California, Berkeley, USA, conducted research on: The School of Ibn 'Arabi's Influence on the Kubrawi Order.

Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin is Associate Professor, School of Humanities, University of Science Malaysia. His research was on the Interpretation of the Political Hadiths: Comparative Studies Between Traditions and Modernism.

Mr Marwazi Dziauddin is Deputy Mufti, Jabatan Mufti Negeri Kedah. Dr Dziauddin undertook research exploring public perception and acceptance of the roles played by church in societal development.

Academic Links with Turkey Reviewed President Gül at Clarence House

On 23 November our Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, received HE President Abdullah Gül, who was on a State Visit to the United Kingdom. Their shared interest in the work of the Centre, as Patron and as Trustee, was symbolised by a presentation, in Clarence House, of the Centre's work, with a special emphasis on its relevance to relations between the UK and Turkey. HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and HE Mrs Hayrūnisa Gül also attended the event.

Alongside displays showing the way in which Turkish scholars, and leaders of opinion, have participated in, and supported,



Istanbul Courtyard facing west

the Centre's activities, there was also an opportunity to meet some of the present-day Centre scholars from Turkey including Dr Ismail Cebeci (Visiting Fellow) and Mr Kerem Bayrakceken (Centre Scholar) who were presented to the Prince of Wales and to the President.

Turkey has played a prominent role in the Centre's work from the beginning. Its publications programme has included books illuminating the historic role of influential Turkish thinkers and the Journal of Islamic Studies has regularly focussed on Turkish themes. Many senior Turkish leaders, including HE President Gül himself, and Turkish scholars, have presented lectures at the Centre, or participated in seminars and other activities.

The party also viewed the latest pictures showing progress on the new building of the Centre, and particularly the magnificent, and now completed, Istanbul Courtyard, which welcomes visitors to its premises. This is adorned with a central fountain of Turkish marble, and marks the gateway to the Centre.

Islam and Tolerance

by HE Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Salimi

On 29 September the Centre was visited by the Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, HE Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed Al Salimi. He delivered a Centre lecture at the Taylorian Institute as part of the Centre series to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.

In his presentation, Sheikh Abdullah emphasised the openness of Islam to dialogue with other faiths, and especially the Abrahamic faiths, which had much in common. He added that people must deal with each other on an equal footing on terms of humanity, dignity and equality. He called for greater efforts to promote inter-faith dialogue and mutual understanding, an endeavour in which he has played an active personal role and underlined the initiatives undertaken by the Sultanate of



HE Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Salimi lecturing at the Taylor Institute

Oman to encourage dialogue and scholarly discussion.

Dr Farhan Nizami, Director of the Centre, introduced His Excellency and Mr Richard Makepeace, Registrar, thanked him for his lecture.

HRH Raja Dr Nazrin Shah speaks on Human Rights: An Islamic Perspective



HRH Raja Dr Nazrin Shah speaking at the Examination Schools

On 9 November the Centre hosted a lecture at the Examination Schools by newly appointed Trustee, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Perak, Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, entitled "Islam, Muslims and Human Rights".

He first addressed the development, from a primarily secular perspective, of Western approaches to human rights law and theory. These had subsequently been the basis for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a series of additional international conventions.

It was not only Muslim countries which had reservations about some of these approaches. A number of governments had entered reservations of one kind and another. Nonetheless, there was a tendency from some commentators to argue that Muslim and Western approaches were irreconcilable.

Proceeding from a detailed analysis of relevant texts Dr Nazrin argued that in fact many of the concepts and values enshrined in modern Western texts could be found, and at a much earlier date, in Muslim legal and religious texts.

After the lecture the Provost of Worcester, Professor Jonathan Bates, proposed the vote of thanks.

Building Democracy in Iraq a lecture by HE Mr Osama Al Nujafi



HE Mr Osama Al Nujafi signing the visitor's book at the Centre's New Building.

HE Mr Osama Al Nujafi, Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, visited the Centre on 11 October. He visited the Centre's new building, delivered a lecture in the Examination Schools, and attended a dinner hosted by the Centre at Balliol College. He was accompanied by a large delegation of Iraqi Parliamentarians, representative of the great

diversity to be found within the Parliament. Sir Jeremy Greenstock, formerly UK Special Representative for Iraq, offered the vote of thanks.

In his lecture, Mr Al Nujafi spoke frankly of the challenges facing Iraq as it works to establish a genuine parliamentary democracy in the country. There remained some work to do to achieve that and constitutions should ideally be drafted, he said, by legal experts in times of calm reflection, not in the heat of political controversy. But it was also necessary to develop and embed a broad commitment to making democracy work. That was a challenge which all Iraqi citizens and all institutions needed to face up to. He assured his audience that he and his colleagues in the Parliament would be at the forefront of these working for the success of democracy, and to overcome the many challenges facing that.

Scholarships

For the new academic year the Centre welcomed four undergraduate and five postgraduate Scholars to Oxford. The new Scholars joined and were welcomed by the Centre's sixteen continuing Scholars. Three of the Centre Scholars graduated at the end of the preceding academic year and have joined the alumni community.

The OCIS Scholars are resident at a range of the Colleges across the city and are reading for a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The subject areas range from a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology to a DPhil in Systems Approaches in Bio-Medical Science and an MSc in Pharmacology.

Through contact with the Scholars and their supervisors the Centre is kept informed of the Scholars progress and accomplishments.

This year two Centre Scholars have shown particular excellence during the academic year:

Mr Chaw Keong Yong who is studying for a DPhil in Physics at St Hugh's College has won a University Prize in Physics.

Mr Hussein Omar who is undertaking a DPhil in History at Merton College has had three papers successfully published.

In additions Mr Zaffer Abbas Panjwani who is reading for a BA in English Literature and Language at Lincoln College has become the Editor of The Oxford Student.

Issue 22.2 of the Journal of Islamic Studies, published in May 2011, contains articles by Roxanne Marcotte on Mulla Sadra's proofs for mental existence, Moch Nur Ichwan on the politics of re-Islamization in post-New Order Aceh, and Elizabeth Sirriyeh on Muslim Dream Interpretation.

Issue 22.3 of the Journal of Islamic Studies, published in September 2011, contains articles by Arin Shawkat Salamah-Qudsi on Al-Suhrawardi, Rebecca Gould on Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, and Joseph Chinyong Liow on recent success and challenges for the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS.

Both issues also contain over 25 book reviews each, focusing on important recent publications in the field of Islamic studies.

Training Future Leaders

The Centre organized its annual Young Muslim Leadership Programme in September 2011 at Christ Church, Oxford. This programme, the sixth in the series, brought together young men and women from across Britain for an intensive residential course to explore ways of contributing to British society more widely.

The programme was supported by The Prince's Charities and the Amanah Foundation. It consisted of lectures, discussions and workshops to introduce the participants to the skills they will need to make the most of the opportunities open to them. The focus of discussions was on the future local and national roles they could play, and how they can best serve the aspirations of the Muslim communities in the UK whilst still playing a full part in the activities of the country as a whole.

The Centre was again fortunate to attract a wide range of senior personalities from Parliament, the voluntary sector



The participants with the Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP, The Director and organizers of YMLP

and government including The Rt Hon Alan Duncan MP. The closing session was addressed by the Rt Hon Dominic Grieve, the Attorney General. Participants also had the opportunity to visit the Houses of Parliament, courtesy of the Rt Hon Andrew Smith, MP for Oxford East, and also toured the Centre's new building in Oxford.

The YMLP remains one of the Centre's most important programmes and a central element of its outreach to Muslim communities within the UK.