SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENT

International Conference on Developing Synergies Between Islam and Science, & Technology for Mankind's Benefit (Kuala Lumpur, 1-2 October 2014)

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The *International Conference on Developing Synergies Between Islam, Science, & Technology* held on 1-2 October, 2014 at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) in Kuala Lumpur, featured 40 speakers across diverse fields detailing issues revolving around Islamic discourse and its relationship with science and technology in the world today. The conference was graced by former Malaysian Prime Minister and Chairman of IAIS, YABhg Tun Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, who provided a motivating Opening Address. Many of the speakers – some veterans to the conversation, such as Emeritus Professor Datuk Osman Bakar (Director and Chair SOASCIS, Brunei Darussalam) and Professor Mehdi Golshani (Sharif University of Technology, Iran) – offered several valuable solutions drawing extensively from their educational and activist backgrounds in the fields of environment, education, and policy reform. Professor Osman Bakar in the first keynote address focussed on the concept of beneficial knowledge with reference to science and technology. Speakers were restricted in time due to the large number of presentations. They were however, still able to elaborate succinctly on issues while offering recommendations and solutions together with the hundreds of participants over the two-day period, spanning 16 hours in total, not including Q&A sessions, refreshments, and a catered lunch – where more vibrant discussions took place, giving speakers further time to elucidate points to eager listeners. The Conference programme was divided into 12 themed sessions: (S.1) Cosmology and the Universe, (S.2) Philosophy of Science and Emergence of Biological Systems, (S.3) Principles of Tawhidic Science, (S.4) Applications of Tawhidic Science, (S.5 & S.7) History of Science, (S.6) Medical Applications of Tawhidic Science, (S.8 & S.10) Science Education, (S.9) Bioethics, (S.11) Forum on the History and Education of Science from an Islamic Perspective, and (S.12) Plenary Forum on Bioethics: Current Status and the Way Forward.

The second keynote address, provided by Distinguished Professor Tun Kamal Hassan, discussed the epistemological implications of the Qur'anic revelation to human society, elaborated on characteristics of the people who possess sound intellects (*Ulu al-Albab*). He then elucidated the higher purposes of the Qur'an

- ultimately to make human beings and societies know Allah through knowing His signs, which when properly interpreted and applied make the life and work of Muslims a comprehensive worship (*`ibadah*) of Allah, the Most Gracious. Some notable presentations included discussions of the epistemological influences of contemporary science and its Islamic counterpart. Professor Alparslan Acikgenc (Yildiz Technical University, Turkey) explained the epistemological foundations of the contemporary history of science, and elucidated how sciences develop through a 'knowledge system' based on certain metaphysical principles inherent within the primary belief system of particular cultures. Alparslan further proposed a fresh philosophy of science with an epistemological approach from an Islamic perspective. Professor Mulyadhi Kartanegara enlightened us on Rumi's exposition of the Living Earth and the ardent love (*'ishq*) of it towards the Divine, which explains the evolutionary process with its apex in the creation of humankind who represent both the microcosm and macrocosm of the universe. Other discussions focussed on society's comprehension regarding Islam and scientific discoveries. Professor Mehdi Golshani's (Sharif University of Technology, Iran) spoke on how Islam can give a proper orientation to scientific and technological development based on the holistic concept of Tawhidism (Oneness), which attempts to incorporate all elements of human understanding into one. He focussed on the misuses of science in the contemporary period, followed by reasons for the "brain-drain" in the Muslim world which he blamed on the relative lack of scientific institutions and funding. A number of presentations focussed on the environmental crisis facing the world, the ethical dimensions of scientific practice, as well as how to educate properly the public on these issues. Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Founding CEO, IAIS, Malaysia) explained the basic principles of environmentalism from the Islamic perspective, drawing on the Qur'an and Sunnah, to argue for a *fiqh* of "balance" and "cleanliness" – definitive labels of the religion itself – while promoting a culture of communal responsibility in effectively applying these principles in society, which would in turn more heavily manage and penalise those major corporations and organisations that are responsible for many of the prevailing environmental issues. Dr. Daud Batchelor (Associate Fellow and Conference Chair, IAIS, Malaysia) gave a stimulating talk on the practical applications of a Tawhidic approach to science by focusing on the reduction of waste consumption across the world through the implementation of the Islamic principles of *tazkiyah* (self-improvement) and *qana'at* (contentment) – in contrast to capitalistic consumerism and greed, which have been instrumental in the environmental degradation of the world.

Assoc. Professor Isham Pawan Ahmad (IIUM, Malaysia) spoke about the need for science to have values and ethics incorporated into its standard

methodologies. He insisted that the contemporary understanding of science as neutral and valueless was contrary to reality – biases and value are never separate from practice, though the researchers behind scientific enquiry are often unaware of them. He argued for a transparent and open "humanising science" based on re-evaluation of current scientific methodology, which has the metaphysical baggage of secular materialism and a seemingly apathetic attitude towards ethics and values. Eminent scholar, Professor Malik Badri's presentation was on a form of psychological shock therapy that had been utilised by early Muslim physicians. Substantial discussions on bioethics were also revealing, such as Dr. Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen Shaikh Mohd Salleh's and Prof. Adeeba Kamarulzaman's (University Malaya, Malaysia) paper on harm reduction in intravenous drug use from the Islamic perspective. Dr. Abdurezak Abdulahi Hashi (IIUM, Malaysia) spoke on current breakthroughs in the biosciences and whether we can implement ethical values in controlling and managing these discoveries in the near future for mankind's benefit rather than its exploitation. Dr. Elmira Akhmetova (IAIS, Malaysia) capped this session by exposing the contemporary state of genetically modified foods (GMFs) and their possible harmful effects on society given the lack of research on long-term side effects of GMF.

The final presentations focused on the lack of proper scientific education and values at primary and secondary levels of education. Nur Jannah Hassan (IIUM, Malaysia) called for a Qur'anic worldview to be implemented into the science curricula in Malaysia in particular, and in general across the Muslim world to counteract the overly materialistic (both metaphysically and ethically) perspective of the secular sciences. She proposed and has been working on a project along with Professor Kamal Hassan to revise modern day textbooks geared towards Muslim students at the primary and secondary levels, infusing them with the proper values and understanding of science from an Islamic perspective. A case study was then given by Mohammad Hilmy Baihaqy bin Yussof and Professor Osman Bakar (SOASCIS) regarding how such an approach can be effectively applied from experiences of education in Brunei.

Finally, a summation of the conference and suggestions for the Way Forward was provided firstly by Professor Osman Bakar and then Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali. They favoured the holding of further such conferences on Islam and Science, but with more focus, perhaps in the field of Tawhidic medical applications and bioethics or Islam and environmental sustainability. The application of the *maqasid al-shari'ah* to assessing and reforming technology development also deserves much greater attention. Several important policy recommendations from the Conference deliberations of relevance to the Malaysian government and the Muslim world at large were suggested for implementation. These included revising educational curricula, laws pertaining to consumption

and waste management, stricter laws and punishments for those who harm the environment, and practical/ethical guidelines for medical practitioners and bioscience researchers to implement in their everyday practices so as to ensure a balanced, productive, and healthy society. Overall, the conference was a beneficial and enlightening experience which has set the stage for further research for academicians and practitioners on how to facilitate progress and remedies in the Muslim world regarding its scientific heritage and current practices. In the meantime, IAIS will be busy preparing the Conference Proceedings volume to ensure that the many excellent ideas provided in the papers presented receive a wider more international exposure.

International Summer School on Islam and Science (Paris, 22-31 August 2014)

Daud AbdulFattah Batchelor, IAIS Malaysia

An excellent program on Islam and Science was co-organised by Professors Nidhal Guessoum and Jean Staune (Director, Universitie Interdisciplinaire de Paris) in Paris for 21 Muslim 'students' from universities and institutions in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, France, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and the United Kingdom, Indonesia and Malaysia. Professorial lectures were delivered by prominent Muslim scientists/engineers/religious scholars – Nidhal Guessoum (American University of Sharjah, UAE), Ehab Abouheif (McGill University, Canada), Bruno Guiderdoni (Islamic Institute of Advanced Studies in Paris), Odeh Jayyousi (Jordan), Usama Hasan (Quilliam Foundation, UK) and leading Christian scientists – Philip Clayton (Claremont School of Theology, USA), Denis Alexander (Faraday Institute, Cambridge, UK) and Jean Staune. This was a cutting edge program on the state of thinking on critical issues regarding Religion and Science. To support the training, group visits were made to the impressive institutions of the *Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle and the Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie*, as well as to the Central Paris Masjid. The program was not all scientific as participants were also treated socially to warm French hospitality and delicious cuisine for their lunches and dinners.

The objective of the school was to train participants on how to address questions of Islam/Religion and Science and to move the discourse beyond *i'jaz* (suggested miraculous aspects of science in the Qur'an) and simplistic understandings of belief and science. Professor Nidhal Guessoum outlined four main schools of thought on Islam and science: (1) Sacred Islamic Science (Syyed Hossein Nasr and followers) (2) Ethical Islamic Science (Ziauddin Sardar), (3) Universal Science (Mohammad