

ecoislam



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www.ifees.org.uk

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March Against Climate Change

The London march against Climate Change on 3rd December 2005 attracted 10,000 people from diverse backgrounds, all concerned about the damage being caused to the environment. Amongst them, a group of Muslims called for individuals and nations to act more responsibly towards the earth. Human beings have been divinely appointed as guardians of the earth, they believe. Taking care of the world is not a matter of choice for them, but a religious and moral obligation.

In spite of the unpredictable British winter weather, a brave Muslim group gathered in central London to join an interfaith contingent in the march against Climate Change.

The event highlighted the failure of some countries to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty aimed at preventing the worst effects of climate change by limiting carbon emissions.

Amongst the Muslim group, an active Islamic environmentalist, Mizan Raja sported goggles and a snorkel to draw attention to the predicted flooding of countries like Bangladesh due to climate change. Mizan was joined by other members of LINE, the London Islamic Network for the Environment and IFEES, at a bookstall that attracted many passers by. Their placards read slogans like, 'Oil Addiction is Planetary Affliction,' highlighting some of the key messages that campaigners were trying to convey at this landmark event.

Meanwhile the Founder-Director of IFEES, Fazlun Khalid, shared a platform with journalist George Monbiot and Caroline Lucas of the Green Party, all of whom delivered powerful speeches to the 10,000 strong crowd.

More inside...

Climate Change

Editorial

What Is Climate Change and How Will It Affect Me?

Climate change is a modern phenomenon that is giving cause for concern globally. It is a disruption to the natural climate caused by the greenhouse gases that mankind is pumping into the air. By burning fossil fuels like coal and oil at an alarming rate, rich countries are causing most of the damage, whilst it is poor countries that will suffer first. We don't know how much irreversible damage has already been done to the climate, but we know that if we don't act soon, the consequences will be devastating for us all.

There is mounting evidence that people around the world are already dying from the effects of climate change. The increase in 'energy' in weather systems has led to an increase in temperatures, more extreme and violent weather, and more frequent 'natural' disasters like floods, droughts, hurricanes and wildfires leading to widespread devastation. As the temperature of the planet increases, glaciers will melt even faster, feeding into the expanding oceans. As a result, the sea level will rise and flood millions of homes in Bangladesh, Vietnam and India. The hotter temperatures will also lead to droughts, food shortages and water scarcity affecting billions. The scarcity of drinking water and land for farming and habitation will mean that people and countries will fight to secure their basic needs. It is clear that if we want to prevent both 'natural' disasters and man-made wars, we must reverse climate change.



The Bigger Picture

In our eager push for universal prosperity we have lost sight of the finite and delicate nature of planet earth and our place in it, writes Fazlun Khalid.

It is estimated that the human species has existed on this planet for about 800 lifetimes. This is a millisecond of a millisecond in terms of the age of planet earth. 650 of these lifetimes were spent in caves and only in the last 3 has anyone used an electric motor anywhere.

In spite of their excesses past civilisations were biodegradable. When old civilisations died the forests just grew over them and the sands covered their traces. They left no pollutants, damaging poisons or nuclear waste. By contrast, and assuming we survive as a species, archaeologists excavating our present rampant civilisation in the future will need radiation suits!

On the one hand we are emitting lethal greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and on the other we are cutting down trees, the very resource that absorbs these emissions. By simultaneously committing these crimes against nature, we have launched a suicidal assault on the natural world.

We are living it up today in the hope that tomorrow never comes. We are comatosed by consumerism and a contrived prosperity that is bringing us to the edge of ecological disaster. No thought is given to where it is all coming from, of the finiteness of planet earth, of the increasingly heavy ecological footprints we leave behind. We ourselves are the collective victims of this self-inflicted plunder.

An edited version of the speech by Fazlun Khalid, Founder Director of IFEES, delivered at the Climate Chaos March, 3rd December 2005, in London.



Fresh Hope in Aceh

Grassroots

The tsunami that hit Southeast Asia last year was an environmental disaster of epic proportions. It took the lives of at least 200,000 people and left a trail of physical and social wreckage that will take years to repair. We have witnessed other disasters since, the most notable being the devastating earthquake in Pakistan, but the greatest is perhaps yet to come. We are sitting on a bigger "tsunami" of a different order that is going largely unnoticed; one that is rumbling away right under our very feet.

In March 2005, the UN published a report, The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, to which over a thousand experts worldwide contributed. It paints "a chilling picture of environmental decline" and offers a dire warning to people "who continue to put ecological concerns on the backburner" and adds that "humanity is now trembling on the brink of disaster."

This disaster is environmental degradation. It is problems like damage to the ozone layer which has increased the rate of skin cancer; poisoned water systems that lead to toxic chemicals in breast milk and cause deformities in children; deforestation that causes landslides, flooding and choked river systems; global warming that threatens climate change and consequently lifestyle changes on a massive scale.

The sad reality is that Muslims, alongside others, have been causing life threatening systemic damage to the earth. We have tampered grievously with the mizan (the balance) of God's creation. So how can we redeem ourselves? How can we express ourselves in the role of "khalifa" (guardians) of the earth, as God appointed us? Can we leave behind a liveable planet for the generations that succeed us?

Our experience suggests that we do not have to look too hard to find solutions to these matters in the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet (saw). The people of Aceh, Indonesia, who were most severely hit by the tsunami, have had an understanding of the relationship between Islam and the environment that goes back hundreds of years. Their understanding of the environment was even expressed in their 'khanon' (legal) system in the 14th century - a situation seemingly unmatched in the Islamic world.

On a recent trip to Aceh I discovered that the people there have a wealth of knowledge about the environment and their Islamic duty towards the earth. Sadly, as with many other things, this knowledge was allowed to lapse during the colonial era but people still struggle to cling to vestiges of these practices like preserving water courses and grazing rights. Now however, the potential exists to reintroduce these teachings with a new vitality as the area rises from the ashes.

I am hopeful for Aceh and confident that Muslims elsewhere will go back to understanding the responsibilities they have in looking after the earth. IFEES has been working in partnership with Muslim Hands and the Indonesian branch of the World Wide Fund for Nature to help establish a standard that others would want to emulate.

Fazlun Khalid

Read more about IFEES' work in Aceh in the next issue of Ecolslam.



Inspiring Change

Grassroots



The mindless pursuit of 'progress' has erased modern man's sense of harmony with the natural order and led to reckless behaviour that has damaged, depleted and defiled the earth. Muslim communities have been guilty of ignoring Islamic eco-ethics and allowing a narrow moral focus to obscure all other claims on their conscience. But human behaviour can change, writes Sbah Ahmed, as the example of one island in Zanzibar shows.

Welcome to Misali Island

Misali is an beautiful uninhabited island in the Zanzibar archipelago. It is surrounded by some of the finest coral slopes in the entire Indian Ocean, which are home to 300 species of fish and 42 types of coral. As a site of outstanding natural beauty and an important nesting ground for turtles, Misali was designated a marine conservation area in the 1990s. The island is also a lucrative fishing ground for the predominantly Muslim fishing communities of neighboring Pemba Island, who rely on Misali's fish stocks for their livelihoods.

Fishermen's Dilemma

Sadly, economic pressures and rapidly depleting fish stocks (due to over-fishing by fleets of international trawlers) have forced Misali's fishermen to dynamite the coral reefs in order to secure their catch. This practice not only endangers the fragile reef ecosystems but also threatens the

long-term survival of the fishing community as the indiscriminate explosions kill young fish before they have time to breed.

Inspiring Change

Years of government and NGO-initiated conservation efforts, including an outright ban on dynamite fishing, have been unable to influence the fishermen to stop using dynamite. In 2000, IFEES was asked to intervene by Care International and WWF, in an attempt to investigate whether religious ethics could promote better management of marine resources, and succeed where all other approaches failed.

Introducing Islamic Conservation

IFEES began an extensive Islamic educational programme, working within the traditional structures of the community and enlisting the help of local religious leaders to disseminate core environmental teachings. Through workshops on Quran,



'People have used dynamite and guns to fish the waters. This has destroyed the coral. I am happy that now we have learnt that the Qur'an tells us to protect everything in this world, including the environment. I am more dedicated to protecting the environment now and a more committed Muslim as well.'

Salum Haji , Misali Fisherman

Creation and Conservation, the fishing communities were able to understand how care for God's creation related directly to the coral reef and its life forms. It was an inspiring message, and one they couldn't ignore. As one fisherman put it, "It is easy to ignore the government, but no-one can break God's law."

Towards Sustainable Fishing

Following the IFEEES education programme, Misali fishermen gradually adopted more sustainable fishing practices. As a consequence, sustainable fishing catches have increased and communities are now in a better position to secure catches for future generations. IFEEES has also proposed that Misali be declared a 'Hima,' or a Shariah-based conservation zone, to guarantee its continued protection. A guidebook for Islamic scholars and teachers is due to be published (as soon as funds become available) which should help the message of Islam's inherent environmentalism to be

disseminated to a wider cross-section of the community.

Future Success

Despite the positive and promising changes that IFEEES' work has inspired in Misali, further work still needs to be done before the project can be called a complete success. The Misali Marine Conservation Project is also just one of many IFEEES projects that use the message of the Qu'ran as a basis for caring for the earth. IFEEES has taken on the task of articulating and putting into practice deep-rooted Islamic principles to try and remedy the many ecological imbalances of our age. This initiative is both massive and ambitious, but the example of Misali shows that it is not impossible.

The GM Food Story

Ecobites

In the mid 1990's when unlabelled genetically modified food began to be imported into the UK, people became angry. A genetic experiment was underway and we were the guinea pigs. But what happened then? And what, if anything, have Muslims contributed to the debate? Muzammal Hussain tells the story so far.

The big environmental organisations, already campaigning on the issue of GM, intensified their activities when research from Scotland demonstrated that eating GM foods posed a potential danger to our health. Monsanto, a major producer of GM seeds, wanted discretion, but people wanted to know more. GM hit the headlines and the more that people found out, the more concerned they became.

One such concern sprang from knowledge of the fact that GM crops were growing in the open environment. With the wind blowing and the bees going about their daily affairs, it was inevitable that GM pollen would contaminate nearby fields. The contamination of conventional and organic crops would leave us with no choice but to eat GM. The barn door was now wide open and the horse was almost ready to bolt. Realising that the government was failing us, concerned activists took direct action and began to remove these crops with their own hands.

Meanwhile, within the Muslim community, IFEES began to occupy an important role, explaining in the context of Islamic themes, issues associated with changing the nature of food at such a profound level, as well as the danger that this technology was posing to global food security. The need to support sustainable organic farming practices was also emphasised. IFEES spoke at events in a number of cities including in Edinburgh, London and Reading and also participated in a national march on the GM issue. In addition, a website was launched (www.islamicgmfocus.org), which continues to remain one of the most comprehensive sites on GM foods from an Islamic perspective.

In 1999 a diverse range of organisations that felt



"GM produce is being fed to animals that are destined for 'halal' slaughter"

there needed to be more discussion on the issue, decided to work more closely together. Over 120 national organisations united to form an umbrella body, 'The Five Year Freeze' (now called the GM freeze: <http://www.gmfreeze.org>) and demanded, as the name implies, a minimum freeze of five years, on the commercialisation of GM in food and farming. The five years was to give enough time for more research and debate prior to any decisions being made. Such a freeze never took place, but the alliance played a strong role in applying effective pressure and raising public awareness. IFEES and Islamic Concern were amongst the first to join this alliance, and continue to be part of it.

In 2004, IFEES and the City Circle (a London-based Muslim pressure group) organised a joint event on 'GM food and World Hunger', which took place in East London. Two well-informed speakers, one from Greenpeace and another representing the biotechnology industry, debated the issues in front of a largely Muslim audience. The event provoked lively discussion, and as is the typical pattern, left the vast majority of those present convinced that GM food was not even part of the solution to this real and serious problem.

People pressure has now ensured that in the UK, food retailers are largely keeping GM out of food meant for human consumption. However, as GM produce continues to enter into feed for animals* including for animals destined for halal slaughter, and with millions of hectares of land being used to grow these crops globally, the GM story is far from over.

* Organically reared animals are a notable exception

For further information or comments on the issues discussed email: muzammalh@gmail.com

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Living Islam

IFEES volunteers, led by Harfiyah Haleem, held a series of workshops for children at the ISB Living Islam Camp in the summer of 2005. The workshops, held on 29th and 30th July, were designed to encourage children to show kindness to all living creatures and deepen their understanding of the natural world.

Many of the children were from city backgrounds and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with nature through practical outdoor activities including collecting and studying insects and plants, distilling natural perfumes, flying kites and making model wind turbines.

The children learned that caring for the environment is an important part of being a good Muslim and that all of God's creation from the smallest insect to the powerful wind has its own part to play in the intricate web of life.

Working Together

Collaboration with mainstream environmental and religious groups is a major component of IFEES' outreach work. Key contacts include Greenpeace, East London Muslim Centre, London Sustainability Exchange, IMAAD and the Green Party. IFEES continues to have strong links with Friends of the Earth which was demonstrated recently when IFEES Chairman Hajj Fazlun Khalid, was invited by the Birmingham branch to address an audience of environmental activists and local Muslims.

Building bridges with like-minded groups is vital in establishing social and environmental justice. A shared planet necessitates shared responsibilities and we have much to receive from others, and also much to give.

Local Action

In the UK, IFEES has built strong networks with many organisations and has actively promoted environmental issues. IFEES has also helped Muslims build their capacity to take seriously their civic and religious responsibilities, particularly in the area of environmental protection and eco-friendly living.

In 2005, a significant development was the emergence of local groups that are affiliated with IFEES but work independently on grassroots-based activities.

- LINE (London Islamic Network for the Environment) was established by Muzammal Hussain, a key figure in the GM debate.

- MINE (Midlands Islamic Network for the Environment) was set up in Birmingham by Rianne Tenveen and Parwais Hussain.

- SHINE was established in August 2005 for Sheffield-based activities through the initiative of Kate Fryer and Rachel Twort.

- WELCOME (Wales Environmental Link Creating Opportunities for Muslim Engagement) was set up in Swansea by Masood Yousef and Omer Williams.

- Other cities such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester have also shown an interest in forming local action groups. This trend is encouraged by IFEES and offers hope for the future of Islamic environmental activism.



Going Live

IFEES has received a great deal of interest from the media in 2005 and has participated in programmes on Radio Ramadan, BBC Radio Asia, a Sky TV phone-in on climate change, and appeared on Channel 4's Shariah TV feature on Islam and the Environment.

IFEES has responded to frequent requests for speakers from university Islamic Societies, community organisations, public bodies and interfaith groups, addressing diverse audiences on Islamic environmental ethics and practice. Founders of LINE (London Islamic Network for the Environment), Muzammal Hussain and Harfiyah Haleem shoulder much of the responsibility for meeting demands in the South East.

Funds and Sponsorship

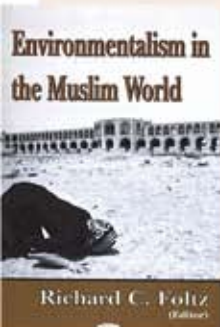
The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation has agreed funding for £20,000 to help IFEES in its educational work. The first half of this allocation was received in March 2005 and has been used to fund a part-time Outreach Worker.

An online donation facility has been set up for IFEES on the website of the Charities Aid Foundation, a support group set up to assist small charities in raising funds for their work.

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News and Events

Pioneering Ecolslam



IFEES has been working extensively, both nationally and internationally to promote an Islamic approach to environmentalism and as a pioneer in this field, regularly receives requests from the academic world to participate in projects.

These include seminars held by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in collaboration with Green College Oxford, Von Hugel Institute at St Edmunds College in Cambridge, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Stirling University and King Abdul Aziz University, Saudi Arabia.

Some written contributions include:

- Environmentalism in the Muslim World, edited by Richard Foltz (Nova Science Publishers): Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics.
- The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Eds, Taylor and Kaplan, (Continuum International Publishing Group): Two entries - (a) *Islamic Basis for Environmental Protection* and (b) *Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences*.

Thinking Global

IFEES has designed projects with local partners in various countries in Asia and Africa. The projects are educational and focused on Shariah based conservation principles. They include:

- Desert reclamation in Nigeria
- Water conservation in Yemen and Indonesia
- Habitat rehabilitation in Pakistan
- Islamic environmental training in Aceh and North Sumatra, Indonesia



An Islamic Guide to Simple Living

"Eat and drink, but not to excess." (Qur'an, 20:81)

- **Limit Consumption** - Try not to buy things you do not need and think about the environmental impact of what you buy. Typical problem items are over-packaged food, exotic fruit transported long distances and household items made from materials that do not decompose when thrown away.
- **Reuse and Recycle** - Even our waste items can do some good to someone if we make use of local recycling facilities. Start by re-using carrier bags and recycle as much rubbish as you can.
- **Be Generous and Grateful** - Instead of wasting money on surplus goods give it away as 'sadaqah' (charity) to the poor. Thank God for what you have and remember, making sure you do not cause harm when using His gifts is showing gratefulness to God.



Eco-Friendly East London

IFEES has been actively involved in a grassroots campaign to encourage Muslims in East London to live in an eco-friendly way. The campaign highlights Qur'anic environmental-ethics and their practical implications for everyday life.

Working with the London Sustainability Exchange, East London Mosque and the London Muslim Centre, IFEES provided 'khutbah' (sermon) notes for Imams which included quotes from the Qu'ran and Hadith related to simple and sustainable living. This has been complimented by stalls in the mosque grounds offering information, advice and freebies such as energy saving lightbulbs and water saving devices.

The Project is part of a London Sustainability Exchange initiative which aims to inspire citizens to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles and make London a greener and more sustainable city.

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