

# ecoislam

Voice of the Islamic  
Foundation for  
Ecology and  
Environmental  
Sciences



Batang Gadis National Park, Mandailing, North Sumatra, Indonesia, where IFEES runs conservation projects with the local community.

## Contents

	Page
Poverty and the Environment	2
Islamic Law and the Environment	3
Pioneering Practice in Indonesia	4
A Man for all Seasons	6
IFEES News & Events	7



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"Corruption has spread far and wide over land and sea, due to the actions of mankind and Allah is giving them a taste of their own actions as a means of finding a way back to Him" (Qur'an 30:41)

## Poverty and the Environment

Poverty and the environment are two of the most critical issues affecting mankind but their impact on each other is often overlooked. Poor communities usually suffer the worst effects of environmental problems. Poverty also forces communities to exploit natural resources and exacerbate problems like deforestation and desertification.

Many of those interested in poverty alleviation aim to improve living standards to match those of the 'developed world.' What they do not consider is that to sustain the standards of the developed world, we need several more planets the size of planet Earth.

The rapid growth in consumption in the past 50 years is putting strains on the environment never seen before. The inequalities in consumption are stark. According to a United Nations report,\* 20% of people in the developed world account for 86% of total consumption expenditures and the world's poorest 20% a negligible 1.3%.

The environmental expense of producing, transporting and disposing of the waste of mass consumption comes at a price we cannot afford, wherever we live in the world.

If our unsustainable consumption continues to put a strain on finite natural resources, there will ultimately be no life left on earth. Attempts at poverty alleviation that ignore the environmental damage caused by the consumption habits of the developed world will thus be futile. Our efforts should not be focused on raising the developing world up to our standards but on promoting a lifestyle that is sustainable for us all.

*More inside...*

\*1998 UN Development Programme Report



# Poverty and the Environment

## Grassroots

### ...continued

Having an environment-friendly approach to development involves recognising the causes of problems such as climate change. The fact is that those worst-affected by its impact have only marginally contributed to the problem. People who live in the most fragile environments are all too often very aware of the consequences of their actions but have no other choice. One way the developed world can address this is through promoting fair trade. The international trade system is greatly skewed against poorer countries meaning that our runaway over-consumption rarely benefits producers in poor countries.

The Islamic approach requires us to adopt a holistic lifestyle and take seriously our role as khalifa (guardian) of the earth. God created the world and its bounties not only for us, but for all previous and future generations. Over 750 verses in the Qur'an (for Muslims the word of God) exhort us to reflect on nature, to study the relationship between living organisms and their environment, to make the best use of reason and to maintain the balance and proportion God has built into creation. To include environmental considerations into all our actions as individuals and communities is considered a major obligation for mankind.

Whilst it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the combined challenges of environmental issues and poverty, each individual is only responsible for as much as he or she can do, and often that just means taking positive steps in one's own life. The Islamic understanding of accountability is that each of us will be questioned about what we did and could have done. A simple effort to reduce, reuse and recycle our personal consumption is perhaps all that is needed from those who are not in a position to educate and influence others. Even if our small personal effort seems insignificant and futile in the context of global problems, it will never go to waste. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "If the Hour (Day of Judgment) comes while one of you holds a palm seedling in his hand and he can cultivate it, he should do so."

Rianne ten Veen



Boy wading the Batang Natal river in Mandailing, Indonesia.  
Photo courtesy of Arbain Rambey

### DID YOU KNOW...?

- 150,000 people die every year from the effects of climate change.\*\*
- The economic costs of global warming are doubling every decade.
- By 2025 more than 3 billion people could be affected by serious water shortages.
- The UN expects 50 million environmental refugees by 2010 and 150 million by 2050.
- 30 million people may be hungry because of climate change by 2050.
- Wars over increasingly scarce resources, such as water and fertile land, are becoming more frequent.

*\*\*For an extended version of this article with full references please see [www.ifees.org.uk/journal](http://www.ifees.org.uk/journal)*



Terrace paddy fields on hill slope with the Batang Gadis river.  
Photo courtesy of Arbain Rambey



# Islamic Law and the Environment

## Editorial

*Caring for the environment is not the most obvious thing that comes to mind when one thinks of Shariah law. Living in harmony with the environment is in fact deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition. Muslim cultures may not always be exemplary models of eco-living but the weight of Islamic law is certainly on the side of a more balanced, harmonious life.*

### **Owner and guardianship**

The starting point for understanding Islam's approach to environmentalism is that everything belongs to God. The Qur'an states: "He to whom the kingdom of the heavens and the earth belongs..... He created everything and determined it most exactly," (Al Furqan, 25:2).

The role of human beings is that of 'khalifa' or guardianship. We have a moral relationship with the rest of creation which demands both self-restraint and an awareness of the needs of others.

### **Common property**

The example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whom all Muslims strive to emulate, is based on some key principles: that the elements that make up the natural world are common property, that all have the right to benefit from natural resources and that the infliction of damage to the natural world should be minimal, bearing in mind future users.

### **Accountability**

Based on the above principles, Muslim scholars have over the centuries invalidated a person's rights over a particular natural resource if their use causes damage to wider society.

Some of the governing principles for these Islamic rulings are:

- Every member of society is entitled to benefit from a common resource to the extent of his/her need so long as s/he does not violate, infringe or obstruct the equal rights of other members of society.
- In return for benefits derived from a renewable resource the user is obliged to maintain its value.
- If the user causes destruction, impairment or degradation s/he is accountable and held liable to the extent of putting right the damage caused.

### **Lost heritage**

The primary concern of all Islamic governance is promoting what is good and removing what is harmful. Part of its mandate is to protect land and natural resources from being abused and misused.

From its earliest years the Islamic state would establish an agency known as the 'hisba' whose specific task was to protect people and establish the welfare of society as a whole. This agency was headed by a learned jurist (muhtasib) who would now be known as Chief Public Health Officer, Environmental Inspector and other duties all rolled into one.

### **Reviving the Prophetic example**

Over the past two centuries these principles and institutions based on the Prophetic example have seen a decline. Sadly, they have been replaced by a model that allows the exploitation of natural resources for profit. We are experiencing the negative consequences of this now in many aspects of our lives. However there are clear indications here as to how this Islamic heritage could again be put to good use in the modern context.

**Fazlun Khalid**

*For an extended version of this article please see [www.ifees.org.uk/journal](http://www.ifees.org.uk/journal)*





# From the Field

## Grassroots

### *Pioneering Islamic Environmental Practice in Indonesia*



In its efforts towards developing an Islamic form of environmental conservation, IFEES held a number of workshops in Indonesia earlier this year. With support from Muslim Hands UK, the first of the workshops took place in the Mandailing region of North Sumatra and the second on the tsunami-hit coast of Aceh.

#### ***Gift to the World***

The frontier forest found in the region of Mandailing-Natal or Madina, the southernmost part of the Province of North Sumatra, is a biodiversity hotspot. Once endangered by environmental destruction from illegal logging, mining exploration, plantations and agricultural encroachment, it is now an officially recognised protected area.

The creation of the Batang Gadis National Park, covering 108,000 hectares, was hailed as 'a gift to the world.' Championed by local residents and district authorities alike, it is the first national park in Indonesia established under the 1997 regional autonomy legislation. The majority of the approximately 380,000 inhabitants of this region are Muslim so the idea of developing a forestry management system based on Islamic teachings was positively received.

#### ***Islamic Legacy***

It is said that a considerable part of the destruction wrought on the Achenese coast by the 2004 tsunami could have been prevented had the mangroves been preserved. This is an argument about scale, but the fact remains that the Achenese coastline had already suffered progressive erosion due to mangrove destruction even before the giant waves hit.

*The main drive of IFEES's work is to develop a particularly Islamic form of environmental conservation. Last February this approach received a boost when IFEES was invited to Indonesia to conduct workshops based on the model developed in recent years.*

*Photos of the Batang Gadis initiative clockwise from top left: Junior and senior classes, Madrasa Roihanul Janna, Maga village; Fazlun Khalid conferring with ulema; workshop participants, Panyabungan, Mandailing, North Sumatra.*







Thankfully, wise counsel now prevails and there is a new determination not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Uniquely, the Achenese have had an understanding of the relationship between Islam and the environment that goes back a few hundred years - a situation unmatched in the Islamic world. However these practices have regrettably been allowed to lapse.

### ***Qur'an & Shariah***

Past experience has shown that encouraging people to protect the environment by appealing to their deeply held beliefs has a special and lasting impact and the initiatives taken in North Sumatra and Aceh confirm this. The thirty or so participants who attended each of these workshops were chosen for their capacity to extend this work and they comprised of senior ulema, specially designated local and regional government officials and representatives from a range of NGOs. In addition to deep study of specific verses from the Qur'an the participants also engaged in examining aspects of the shariah that relate to conservation practices.

### ***Task Force***

There was a very strong consensus amongst the participants that the workshops were a great success. The next steps are to popularise this approach by multiplying the training in the regions to make these practices a reality both in the Batang Gadis National Park and the Achenese coast. There are strong recommendations to establish a task force in each area that would work towards making shariah-based environmental practices a reality, as things rarely happen by themselves. There are also proposals for appointing Islamic Programme Officers and God-willing, this will be a reality before long.

The North Sumatran workshop was jointly organised by Conservation International Indonesia, the Department of Anthropology, University of North Sumatra and the Department of Forestry, Madina Regency. The workshop in Banda Aceh was organised by WWF Indonesia.

*This report was put together with the support of Abdur-Razzaq Lubis the Malaysian Representative, Mandailing All Clans Assembly and Nana Fitriana Firman WWF Indonesia Programme Officer in Aceh.*



# A Man for all Seasons

## Eco-personality



*Professor Emeritus Mohamed Hyder has led a distinguished academic career in Kenya spanning more than four decades. Amongst the many distinctions in his career, he was the first African to be appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Kenya National Parks in the 1960s and 70s. He was also Professor of Zoology for twenty years until his retirement in 1990 and in that period he also led numerous official Kenyan delegations to international forums on the environment and other related subjects.*

*A passionate environmentalist, he now pursues his interests in this field with the same vigour he has employed throughout his life.*

*You have devoted your life to environmental issues. Why did you first choose to go down this green path?*

By accident really. As the first African graduate zoologist to join the Department of Zoology, I was nominated to, and later elected chairman of, the Kenya National Parks Board of Trustees. I got sucked into conservation and have never looked back since.

*How has the environmental debate changed since you first got involved?*

It has changed from the old ideas of preserving wildlife to conserving wildlife to environmental conservation to global environmental concern.

*What do you think Islam and Muslims have to contribute to the wider environmental movement?*

The essential Islamic thesis is that everything belongs to Allah and, as Khalifas (guardians) we are but trustees/managers who have to fulfil that divine order. Part of the job of Muslim conservationists is to remind Muslims of this divine order and to live by it.

*Having lived in Africa & Europe, how would you compare the respective lifestyles and ability to live in harmony with the natural environment of their peoples?*

African peoples have generally been obligate conservationists as people who have traditionally lived on the edge of survival. Unfortunately, the growing obsession with money has often corrupted this fundamental approach to life.

*Kenya has been suffering its worst drought in living memory. How has environmental degradation contributed to this? What can be done at this stage?*

Kenya has an enormous potential for water conservation if we follow our native instincts. If we can build houses that catch every drop of rainwater to an underground reserve, we can support each family, its livestock and still undertake a little vegetable garden to boot.

*Kenya also evokes images of safaris and exotic wildlife. As a Zoologist, can you tell us about any interesting experiences you have had?*

There are far too many to narrate! I would need some 500 pages to share these memories. But perhaps a visit to Mpunguti Marine Park will convince any sceptic of the absolute delights of conservation.\*

*Over the span of your long and varied career, which achievement are you most pleased with and why?*

The virtually single-handed efforts to establish the Mpunguti Marine Park and Reserve is the most satisfying. Why? Because if there is an underwater heaven, this is it!

*What steps have you and your family taken towards a greener way of life?*

In a modest way, as a small dairy farming family, we have derived great joy washing away cattle and poultry manure to tilapia fishponds whose effluent is used to grow napier grass to feed to our dairy herd to produce milk and milk products.

*What makes you optimistic about the future of the planet, and why?*

The silver lining in the dark clouds of so-called development is the fact that there is growing consciousness about the need for being environmentally conservation-minded. The growing environmental lobby is what gives me hope.

*If you could change one thing that impacts the environment what would it be?*

I would get every African home to conserve every drop of rainwater falling on a household and, among other things, make every family use the water to grow ten trees.

*\*Kenya was the first African country to create marine parks and reserves to protect their eco-systems. The Mpunguti Marine National Park on the south Kenyan coast was created in the late 1970s and includes coral reefs which are scientifically important habitats and also one of the most complex eco-systems in the world. It is an important breeding habitat for birds and rare coconut crabs, and visitors enjoy spotting dolphins and humpback whales. The park covers a marine area with four small islands surrounded by coral-reef, including Wasini, a beautiful Muslim coastal island home to about 250 families.*



# News and Events

## Local Action

### Green Weekend in Wales

A Green Weekend was held on 2nd to 4th June 2006 in Swansea, which included a talk entitled, 'Looking after the Environment - A Trust from Allah' by Dr Abdullah Yasin from Newport. Organised by WELCOME (Wales Environmental Link Creating Opportunities for Muslim Engagement) the event attracted over 200 people over the course of the weekend, many of whom were inspired to make positive changes in their lives. The Green Weekend included various presentations and workshops covering topics like recycling, composting, organic food, bio-diesel, real nappies and fair trade. Also discussed were more specialised subjects like waste legislation affecting businesses for the local catering industry.

One of the aims of the weekend was to learn about the work Muslims are doing in the UK and around the world to safeguard the environment and discover practical ways we can all make a difference. Also included was a trip to Bryngawr Park in Bridgend for a family barbeque, a nature trail, environmental arts activities, cartoons for younger participants and competitions on Islam and the environment.

### Manchester

IDEA (Improving Davyhulme's Environmental Awareness) is an initiative aimed at the social, economic and spiritual regeneration of one of the more deprived areas of Greater Manchester.

Co-ordinated by the Anglican Christ Church in Davyhulme, IDEA has the backing of Muslim and other faith groups, the local authority and Beverley Hughes MP, who chaired the launch meeting on 26th May 2006. The meeting included a lively presentation by Dr Joanne Tippet, lecturer at Manchester University, who spoke about her work in the developing world and how she has helped them recover their ecological environment.

IDEA will work on making Davyhulme an eco-parish. The longer term plan is to develop a Visitor Centre where the public can learn about threats to the environment and get practical advice on positive changes they can make in their own lives. What a good IDEA!

To get involved with IDEA contact:  
[iftikharawan@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:iftikharawan@tiscali.co.uk)

### Recycling up by 2% in Tower Hamlets

*A joint project between IFEES and the London Sustainability Exchange (LSx) has led to a significant rise in recycling in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The project, underway since autumn 2005, is thought to have inspired the 'greatest increase in recycling in the shortest time ever recorded.'*

Muslims make up around 45% of the borough's population. Following a pilot project with East London Mosque last year, eight of the most popular mosques in the borough were targeted for the campaign. IFEES produced sermon (khutbah) notes in English, Bengali and Somali on the theme of recycling, giving examples from the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition.



The poster features a mosque dome and minaret. Text on the poster includes: 'CLEANER SAFER TOWER HAMLETS', 'Do not be wasteful', 'তোমরা অপচয়কারী হয়ো না', 'Ha noqon mid wax khasaariya', '(Qur'an 7:31)', 'Produced in partnership with: LSx IFEES', and 'LSx London Sustainability Exchange'.

Snowia Hussain of LSx arranged for Friday sermons and Saturday talks to be given in four mosques, which were delivered by Muzammal Hussain of LINE, followed by information distribution outside the mosques. Coffee mornings were also arranged with four women's groups in the borough during which Harfiyah Haleem of IFEES delivered presentations on recycling and environmentalism from an Islamic perspective.



### Sheffield

SHINE (Sheffield Islamic Network for the Environment) has been working with the 'No M1 Widening Campaign' which affects largely Muslim populated areas. The campaign raises awareness of the motorway expansion plans and how they will affect local communities and the environment.

A Family Nature Walk and Litter Pick was organised through the Muslim Welfare House which included a sermon on the environment delivered by the Imam. Volunteers helped pick up litter from streets and parks. SHINE is hoping to repeat the idea throughout Sheffield, one mosque at a time!

If you would like to get involved in SHINE please contact Kate Fryer via email:  
[k.fryer@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.fryer@sheffield.ac.uk)

### Oops!

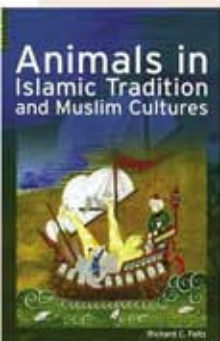
A couple of errors were made in the last issue on page 7. To clarify, LINE is not formally affiliated with IFEES and it was set up by Muzammal Hussain. Muzammal Hussain has been a significant figure in the IFEES campaign on GM and Climate Change whilst playing a smaller role in the wider GM debate.



# News and Events

## Eco-boost

### Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures



By Richard C. Foltz, Oneworld Books, Oxford  
2006 ISBN 1 85168 398 4 p/b 192pp £12.99

American academic Richard C. Foltz humbly prefaces his book with the statement - 'This is a book I had hoped someone else would write.' He admits that he does not have an Islamic ijaza, and that an American Ph.D. doesn't carry much weight in traditional Muslim circles when it comes to religious questions - 'nor perhaps should it.'

However, when he attempted to interest Muslim scholars in the subject he found 'all of these brilliant minds are too preoccupied with the many crises currently facing the human animal alone to focus very much on other species or our relations with them.' Consequently he says he will be 'pleasantly surprised' if Muslims find his book useful.

Foltz's book encapsulates, in a very brief and handy volume, most of the available information about animals in Islam. It encompasses Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh (Islamic law), philosophy, science, literature, art, contemporary scholars, websites, Islamic vegetarianism, and has a chapter on dogs.

The author's attitude is generally open-minded and respectful, pointing out some aspects in which Islam surpasses other traditions in caring for animals, e.g. that animals have souls (p.6). However, he does not shy away from criticism of some backward-looking scholars, and deviations in practice from the enlightened teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (peace be upon him). He is quick to point out where 'species-ism' makes Muslims, like others, feel superior to animals and treat them as mere property or tools.

Unfortunately, in addition to the fair criticism a trace of negatively slanted political comment can occasionally be detected where un-referenced stereotypes of Muslim bloodthirstiness surface (pp.121, 124-5).

Foltz neatly summarises Islamic law on animals, saying that Muslims should 'kill animals only to satisfy hunger or to protect themselves from danger', because 'if observed, this would result in much better treatment of animals ... in Muslim societies and elsewhere.'

His conclusion reads like an environmentalist sermon urging us all to restrain our greed and contribute to the effort to save the planet. The way we live now is beyond carelessness and verges on insanity he declares. This has to change he warns, because 'if current trends continue, we will not.'

Harfiyah Haleem

### Congratulations on producing a fantastic newsletter!

I recently picked up a copy of your newsletter as I was passing through Birmingham's Friends of the Earth shop and I was pleasantly surprised that a great organisation like IFEEES exists.

Just from reading your newsletter, I'm really proud to see the structured and innovative ways you are empowering people to take responsibility for their part in protecting the environment.

Although I don't call myself an environmentalist, I do share the same concerns as yourselves and I do carry out simple everyday things that can help protect the environment. So it's great to see an organisation like IFEEES doing what you do.

Keep up the good work,  
Nazama.

### Photo Competition!

Win an  
environmental  
resource pack  
for Muslims!



All you have to do is take a photo of a tree in your area and tell us why you like it. The photo can be of a whole tree, part of a tree, a number of trees, or anything to do with trees!

Don't forget to add your contact details, when and where the photo was taken, and why you like it. Here's some inspiration:

*If any Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift for him.*

(Hadith, Bukhari)

Send your photos by email to [ecoislam@ifees.org.uk](mailto:ecoislam@ifees.org.uk) (maximum 1MB size) or by post to:

Photo Competition, IFEEES, 93 Court Road, Birmingham B12 9LQ, UK. Closing date: 31 December 06.

Entries will be judged by a professional photographer and announced in the next issue of Ecoislam. Only one entry per person. The judge's decision is final.

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