

ecoIslam

"...Uphold justice
...even against your-
selves or your parents
and relatives. Whether
they are rich or poor..."

(Qur'an 4:135)



Residents of Davao City, Thailand, reach out for tag numbers as proof that they've queued for the cheap, subsidised rice sold by the government.

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"The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know it." (Qur'an 40:57)

The Global Food Crisis

The world is facing a global food crisis caused mainly by human greed. In the developed world people are starting to give up luxuries but in poorer countries they are going without the basics. The world's population is eating far more than it produces and what it does produce is not distributed fairly. A billion of the world's poorest people can no longer afford to feed themselves but elsewhere obesity is a growing problem. We are in the midst of a global food crisis in which some overeat while others starve.

If you look at the well-stocked shelves of your local supermarket it might be hard to believe that there is a global food crisis. In the developed world we still have the luxury of choosing from a variety of foods all year round - the only difference is we have to pay a little more. In much of the developing world the cost of food is so high that the poorest communities are going hungry. Climate change is taking its toll on food production and farmers are adopting modern agricultural methods that only exacerbate the problem.

In this issue we identify some of the causes of the global food crisis and why our current practices and lifestyles are not sustainable. We look at food as the commodity it has now become in the complex global market and why relying on genetically modified crops to meet demands could be disastrous.

We call for a return to sustainable farming practices, an awareness of where our food comes from and a look at what we can so easily produce with our own hands. We take wisdom from the traditions of Islam that call for moderation in what we consume and consideration for what others may not.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Food for two suffices three, and food for three suffices four."

Food Crisis

The great GM question

Governments are severely mistaken if they think that genetic modification of food crops can solve world food shortages. GM is a recipe for potential total and sudden disaster. The risk comes not so much from as yet unknown health risks to consumers of GM food crops but from a potential total failure of GM crops.

Here are some GM facts:

- GM has not been proven to produce more food.
- GM technology is owned by a handful of multinational companies. For these companies GM is about monopolising the food chain “from earth to mouth” and maximising profits.
- GM is not mainly to make plants more hardy and productive according to weather and soil conditions. This is better done by well tested cross-breeding methods.
- GM is designed mostly to make seeds and their plants immune to certain pesticides and herbicides. The latter are supplied exclusively by the same company as the seeds. This may well save the farmer labour costs as he becomes a mere middle manager in the corporately controlled food chain.
- GM crops seriously threaten biodiversity.
- GM seeds contain a so-called ‘terminator’ gene which makes seeds from the first planting sterile (for commercial reasons, of course). Such crops can contaminate neighbouring non-GM crops with the ‘terminator’ gene and render them sterile too.
- What happens when GM crops cease to flourish in the same way that mosquitoes have become immune to pesticides, rats to poison and infections to antibiotics?
- If total failure of GM crops occurs it will happen suddenly and there will remain few alternatives or quick fixes left. Then it will not be a boast of more food but none at all.
- To rely on GM crops for humanity’s future could well prove to be one of the greatest crimes against humanity.

Researchers would do better finding out why the world’s bees are fast disappearing. Without bees’ essential role in pollination we would lose almost half of our food crops. It may well be that GM crops with their default poisons are a major cause of this looming calamity. Albert Einstein said that when the bees disappear humanity will have four years to live. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that the world’s species will disappear like beads off a broken string. Nowadays more attention is given to profits than to Prophets.

Ayman Ahwal



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Why is there a food crisis?

More people, less land

The world’s population is growing fast and there is not enough agricultural land to produce food. More people are moving to urban areas and poor farming practices are damaging agricultural land - these two trends eat into 20 million hectares of land each year.

Fuel replaces food

Biofuels are increasingly being grown for use in vehicles rather than crops for human consumption, pushing up the price of food.

Meeting the meat demand

Countries like China and India are moving from vegetarian to animal-based diets and there is a global demand for more meat and dairy, which require more land to produce. To provide the developing world with the same standard of nutrition as richer countries, agricultural output would have to increase by a massive 430%.

Climate change

Erratic weather caused by climate change has trimmed harvests in some growing regions. Wheat production is down in Australia and the USA due to droughts whereas these countries usually export excess production.

The global picture

Around the world agricultural production is unable to keep up with a rising demand. As consumers we can do our bit by buying food that has been grown locally and growing as much food as we can in our own gardens or allotments (see page 8).

Chris Philpott has worked as a green activist and in inter-faith and community activities for many years. His book, “Rediscovering Green Spirituality” is due to be published this year.

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From Need To Greed

Editorial

Food was once something we produced to meet our human need to eat. Now it is a commodity in a global system that allows some to become obese while others starve. Big businesses making obscene profits are doing all they can to control the food market. Greed is taking precedence over need.

There was a time when people grew their own food and grazed the animals that gave them their protein. This connection between life and land became more tenuous in the 18th and 19th centuries as populations grew and societies became more complex. The Industrial Revolution and the capitalist mode of production were driven by profit. Farms became mechanised and the surplus labour ended up as factory fodder in the growing industrial centres. Rural communities and traditional markets began to disintegrate and today, car boot sales fill those vacant social spaces.

Food is now a commodity in a global system and the subject of intense trading in futures markets. It criss-crosses the globe in the bellies of oversized jets, while speculators and supermarket chains make their profits. Obesity has become a serious problem in richer nations while the poor of the world go hungry. The number of mouths that need to be fed are growing by the second but crops that produce biofuel are being planted in deforested areas instead of food. The hungry take second place behind the motor car.

Farming today is geared towards maximum return on investment and this means the intensive use of artificial fertiliser and pesticide that degrades the land and poisons water courses. This system also has a devastating effect on animals bred for consumption. Broiler chickens become cannibals and the bones of dairy cattle crumble within two years of their brief lives when they are over-bred to give excessive milk. This kind of industrial food is now known to damage our own body functions and there are also ominous signs of the harm that genetically modified foods could do both to humans and the environment.

Nature behaves in cycles and takes its own course, regardless of the grievous injuries we continue to inflict on it. Our species now needs to function in keeping with the rhythms of the natural world, if only to save ourselves. As the Qur'an reminds us, *"The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know it."* (40:57).

It is encouraging to see the growth of a counter-movement that advocates the sensible return to organic farming, whole food and local markets. The reduction in carbon emissions from "food miles" would be one positive outcome of this movement. The other equally important consideration concerns food security. We should increasingly be growing the food we eat locally and not be dependent on the profit margins of big globalised business. It is time for people to take control of what they eat and how they live their lives.

Fazlun Khalid

Founder of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences



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Fatwas to save the Environment

Conservation

The world's first fatwas on the environment have been issued by scholars in Indonesia, a country that is home to the largest Muslim population and a wealth of natural resources including forests, oceans, fertile land and minerals. The pioneering rulings which forbid illegal logging, mining and burning of forests, are a timely reminder that Muslims have a religious obligation to protect the environment.

Living in harmony with nature has always been part of the Islamic way of life but it is only now that religious scholars (*ulama*) have felt the pressing need to issue specific fatwas (religious edicts). The rulings, which are firmly based in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), compel Muslims to act responsibly on Earth or risk breaking the divine laws of God (*shariah*).

Who needs a fatwa?

The fatwas were issued after a detailed investigation into Indonesia's eco-system which found that the country is facing an ecological, social and economic crisis. Some of the many problems identified were the loss of water sources, severe pollution causing a health hazard, an increase in natural disasters and the use of dangerous materials that endanger the future of human life. The study concluded that the state has a religious duty to outlaw these "sins against the environment and the public good".

What's their purpose?

In the Islamic worldview, God is the Creator and Owner of all the Earth's resources and has given mankind the role of managing them. The state has a responsibility to not only ensure that people have access to the resources they need but also to preserve them for future generations. In most Muslim countries, resources are being exploited with little or no regard for the long-term damage being caused. Indonesia is the first Muslim country to recognise that its environmental problems need to be tackled from an Islamic perspective.



Dense smoke clouds form over burning forests in Indonesia



Burning forest for agriculture in Indonesia



Logging activities in Borneo, Indonesia

Will anyone respect them?

The fatwas were issued by the Ulama Council of Indonesia (MUI), which advises government and the public on religious and social matters. Religious scholars are widely respected in Indonesia as “the heirs of the Prophets” (*hadith*). Their rulings carry immense weight amongst the Muslim population, many of whom are members of religious organisations that are represented in the Ulama Council. The council’s Islamic law experts (*faqih*s) have the authority to issue fatwas and provide guidance on contemporary issues such as Islamic banking, family planning and the environment.

What’s the ruling on burning forests?

In Kalimantan, the Indonesian island where the fatwas have been issued, forests have been burned in the dry season to make more space for crops. In the wet season this causes increased flooding and the fires create massive smoke-clouds that severely affect public life, from interfering with the public transport system to damaging people’s health. The fatwa therefore bans any burning of forest or grassland for the short-term benefit of a few whilst causing long-term damage to the people of Kalimantan and neighbouring areas.

What about logging and mining?

Illegal logging and mining are widespread in Indonesia. Cutting down trees and damaging the land cause many social and environmental problems including flooding and landslides. The fatwa declares that both activities are prohibited in Islam and therefore any income generated from these activities is also prohibited, or *haram*. This has serious implications for Muslims who are required by their faith to earn an ethical living only from permissible sources.

What impact have they had?

Although it is too soon to measure the impact of the fatwas, there is already evidence of a significant reduction in these illegal activities. In issuing the fatwas the Ulama Council of Indonesia has also helped raise a general awareness of Islam’s position on the environment. The fact that the rulings have come from scholars who are widely respected by the public means they could not have had a better chance of success, or indeed come at a more crucial time.

Fachruddin Mangunjaya

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Fatwa

“The burning of forests and grassland, whether for the purposes of forestry, farming, plantations, grazing or other purposes, which results in smoke-clouds, damage to the environment and harm to human life is *haram* [forbidden].”



Mud volcano in Sidoarjo, East Java (photograph:Paring Waluyo)

Fatwa

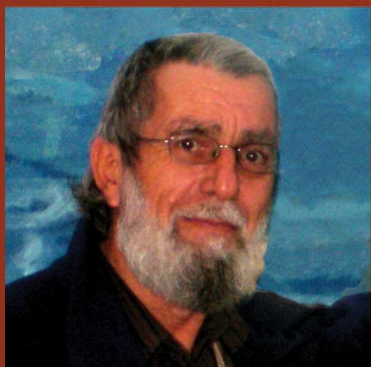
“Logging and mining which damage the environment and harm society and/or the nation are *haram*. All activities and income from businesses related to these are *haram*. It is *fardh* [obligatory] upon law enforcement agencies to act firmly to enforce the law.”



Advancing mud has swamped over 10,000 homes (photograph:Paring Waluyo)

A Man of the Earth

Eco-personality



Ayman Ahwal is a British journalist, film-maker, craftsman and environmentalist who campaigns for the protection of threatened rainforests in Malaysia and Indonesia. He converted to Islam in the late '60s, while in the Moroccan desert. His extensive travels across the world, and years spent living in wildernesses have reinforced his belief in the interconnectedness of all life. He speaks to Ecolslam about frugal living and the importance of staying in touch with the natural world.

How did your interest in environmentalism first arise?

My love of the environment, combined with horror at the way it's being abused, began with Islam. When living with traditional Muslims living close to the land, I perceived a harmony between men and nature that I had not seen before. This symbiotic relationship of man with nature extended right into the cities at that time (some 40 years ago). Things have changed now as urban Muslims become slaves to consumerism. Frugal, 'close to nature' living fades nowadays in the haste towards 'progress.'

But perhaps the most environmentally vivid experience of my life came from wandering in the desert. Things are very clear in the desert. Heaven and Earth, life (water) and death (no water); from earth and water stems every life form. Living in the forest many years later, the memory of the desert became an instantaneous reminder of the priorities in the natural order. Then one sees how interconnected every living creature is and how Allah's pattern of life is so supremely beautiful. In spite of our sciences we have only understood 0.01% of His creation on Earth. Yet the destruction continues unabated. Who will stop it? Sadly Muslims seem unconcerned.

Can you describe the different projects you have been involved with over the years?

Wherever and whenever I have the opportunity, I do some gardening. To dig a field or a garden is a very humbling and spiritually rewarding occupation as well as being good exercise. Perhaps the most thought-provoking garden was one I made in the tropical forest. Where the garden becomes wilderness is a critical point of understanding of one's relationship with Creation. To be reminded of the earth is a part of Islamic education. At present I am involved with building an eco-village in post-tsunami, post-war Aceh in Indonesia. In collaboration with IFEEES we are also launching an ambitious project of tree planting. Trees live in communities and families like we do. Planting a tree is an act of charity.

Your latest production is the environmental campaign film, 'Clean Medina.' What potential do you think film and music have to contribute to the environmental cause?

Plenty. The media with film and music is the culture of the day and has largely replaced religion as the prime mover of public attitudes in urban societies. Urban Muslims are not immune to this and in any case most have lost contact with nature except

perhaps as a recreational facility. Hopefully the film "Clean Medina" has started the ball rolling to get people, young and old, talking about public cleanliness. Most ills of the environment are caused by man's lack of cleanliness in one way or another.

Do you think that 'Islamic Environmentalism' can make an impact in the struggle to save our planet?

This word 'environmentalism' sounds like just another distorted pseudo-scientific worldview like atheism, humanism, secularism, Islamism, etc! To be complete (*insan al kamil*) a Muslim should be as conscious of the natural environment as he is about other temporal preoccupations, as well as his *nafs* (ego), his *ehsan* (striving for excellence) and his *ibadat* (worship). The environment is about loving the Earth. To serve the people is to love Allah; to manage the Earth wisely is to love Allah. It's like the other face of *deen* (faith). Without being conscious of the natural world a Muslim is out of balance. How then can he be expected to be *khalifah* (guardian) and see when nature is out of balance, as it truly is today?

What would you say is your greatest 'environmental' inspiration?

Surah Rahman of the Qur'an. Read it ten times. You will see why.

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

Allah does not change people until they change themselves.

What actions help you personally to live a greener way of life?

Live as frugally as possible, throw away as little as possible, be sparing with water and remember the Garden. Let's make frugality fashionable, as it was with the early Muslims. A craftsman works materials with his hands and learns patience, similar to farmers. People who live on the land still live in the *fitrah* (the natural state). If you look at any person of faith who has worked all his life on the land, when they get to a certain age they have this wisdom. The land itself, and harmony with the earth, gives mankind wisdom. But we are deaf to that. When Islam combines with the wisdom of the Earth it's like an inspirational spark - knowing man's relationship with the Earth and the interdependence of both. Allah is the ultimate conservator and may He accept our efforts.

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Interviewed by Samina Faiz

News and Events

Global Roundup



Clean Medina Campaign Film

Directed by Ayman Ahwal

The Clean Medina Campaign launched a jihad against litter in Muslim areas of Birmingham in September 2007, coinciding with Ramadhan. With support from IFEEs, Birmingham City Council and Islamic Relief a grand clean-up took place in Small Heath, with drummers, rap artists and youth from the community joining in. The campaign film has recently been released, generating great interest in the initiative.

The image on the cover sleeve hints at what the film offers - graffiti on a brick wall, and a hoody-clad youth in silhouette. The film was produced in conjunction with the youth of Small Heath and Sparkbrook, with local rapper Omar Hassan performing original rap throughout the film. Aimed at the generation who are partly the cause and the possible solution to the problem, the film is deliberately youth-friendly in language and tone.

The film opens on a brick wall spray-painted in Arabic with a *hadith*, "Cleanliness is half of faith", however the street is strewn with overflowing bin bags and litter. Bearded Muslim men walk through the mess, tut-tutting as they step in the muck. Juxtaposing the teaching of the Prophet (peace be upon him) against the reality of so many inner-city Muslim communities sums up the problem - we are failing to practise what we know and preach. As Omar tells it in his rap, "You wouldn't think that keeping clean is part of *Iman* (faith) and that we're supposed to be *Khalifah* (guardian) of our patch".

The film avoids adopting a preachy-tone, instead illustrating the problem, some of its causes, and the solution in a humorous and entertaining manner. Although the film takes a different approach from the sober Keep Britain Tidy campaign of the 1970s and '80s, the message remains the same.

The appearance of a turbaned, white-robed Osama-lookalike declaring jihad on litter has caused a little controversy - however, amongst the target youth audience, he is more likely to raise a laugh than an eyebrow. The young volunteers in the film who wrapped their faces in scarves, and attacked the streets armed with litter-pickers certainly seemed to enter into the spirit of things. The film ends with an explanation of the meaning of Jihad in this context - "a struggle against our weaknesses and failings" and a prayer that it not be misunderstood. Ameen to that.

The 15-minute long film has already aired on Birmingham's local Muslim satellite channel, Noor TV. Hopefully, schools, mosques and youth groups will also pick up on the campaign and help it to gain momentum both within Birmingham and eventually nationwide.

Green Guide for Muslim Homes

A green guide to help Muslim households reduce climate change has been published by Lifemakers UK and IFEEs with Muslim Hands, the Nottingham-based charity meeting production costs. The booklet explains the impact of climate change and using Islamic references, explains why Muslims must do their bit for the environment.

The Green Guide is unique in that it is a simple, practical handbook that looks at different aspects of the Muslim household and suggests changes that can have a big impact on climate change. These include decisions about domestic food, water, laundry, heating, electricity, transport and recycling. At the end of the 20 page booklet is also a 'How green is my family' checklist that gives households something positive to aim towards.

The booklet has been printed in time for Ramadhan, the month in which Muslims are most reflective of their actions.



UK's first eco-mosque

The UK's first purpose-built eco-mosque has been constructed by environmentally-conscious Muslims in Manchester. The Al-Markaz Al-Najmi attended by Bohras of the Ismaili Shia tradition, has solar panels on its roof, underfloor heating, wood from renewable sources, low energy light bulbs, and walls built from reclaimed stone.

The £3.5m building is the first of its kind and hopes to be an example to other mosques. "The eco-element arises out of what a mosque is meant to be. It is meant to be friendly in every aspect, which includes being friendly to the environment," the mosque's vice president, Mustafa Abdul Hussein told his local paper. "We should set an example and having eco-friendly features makes those congregating there aware of the issues."

Although the mosque does not fully run on renewable energy and includes some imported stone, it has managed to incorporate many environment-friendly features into its design. "It hasn't really been any more costly than if we were to do it any other way," said Mr Hussein, "and there is a much greater gain to have with a mosque which creates its own energy."

Manchester is also set to be home to a £10 million fully efficient eco-mosque that is being planned at Salford University. It will be run using ambient radiant energy, solar panels and have a bio-garden for recycling and geo-thermal energy.

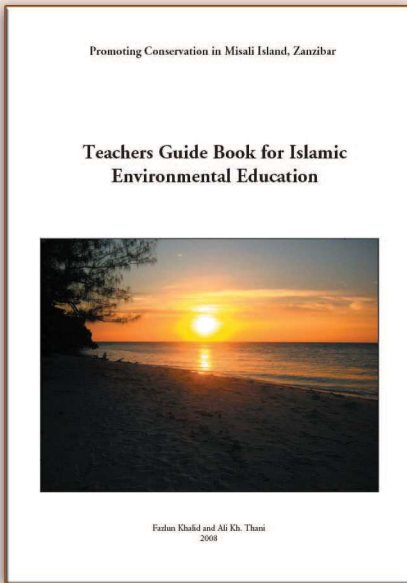
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Views and Reviews

Promoting Conservation in Misali Island, Zanzibar

Teachers' Guide Book for Islamic Environmental Education

Fazlun Khalid and Ali Kh. Thani



This long-awaited book is a guide to Islamic environmentalism, designed to be used by local imams and *madrasa* teachers. It is based on the grassroots Misali project in Zanzibar, implemented by IFEEES and Care International, but provides a pattern of teaching that can be replicated in other projects around the world.

On Misali Island, as elsewhere, people have lost their traditions of respect for the environment. Secular reasoning from the government and other

agencies had been unsuccessful in convincing local fisherman to abandon their destructive practices and return to more sustainable technologies. It was only Islamic precepts that finally got through to them.

Co-written by a local Misali project officer, the book is a Muslim-to-Muslim dialogue that does not have the tone of a government or western expats telling locals how to manage their affairs. It speaks about conservation using the language of the Qur'an, explaining that 'the holistic approach to environmental education' is deeply embedded in the meaning of *tawhid*, the word 'environment' can often be used as a substitute for *khalq* and that the modern destructive attitude can be described as 'openly challenging Allah's authority'.

Scientific arguments may come and go but the Qur'an's teachings are timeless. Muslims need only to be reminded of them and shown how to apply them - and this book does just that.

Harfiyah Haleem

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Grow Your Own Food

Rising food prices and the global credit crunch are forcing people to rethink their spending and eating habits. As organic food prices increase, concerns about chemicals and pesticides remain as worrying as ever. For Muslims, food should be both *halal* (permissible) and *tayyab* (pure/wholesome), and one way of ensuring this is to grow it ourselves.

Even if your garden is a balcony or patio, it is possible to grow fresh produce in containers. Home-grown organic fruits, herbs and vegetables will cost you much less but you will value them more. The benefits of home-grown food are more than worth the effort of getting your hands dirty.

Cut your carbon footprint

Growing your own food reduces the distance from farm to fork to mere yards - backyards. No transport, no packaging and no toxic chemicals all add up to a better environment.

Taste the difference

The taste of fresh harvested produce is a flavour to be savoured and cannot be rivalled by the supermarket variety. You can also grow delicious old heritage varieties that are unavailable in supermarkets.

Know your food

Productive gardening can reconnect us with the natural cycles and seasons of the year. The miracle of growing food from a tiny seed helps us to regain respect and awe for God's creation and become more appreciative of the interdependence of life on Earth.

Freedom of choice

Growing your own food reduces your dependency on supermarkets, as you actively participate in food production. It also gives you more choice about the quality of your food as you decide what to grow, which variety you prefer and when to harvest.

Health matters

Once you've battled frost, drought and slugs you'll be highly motivated to eat more of your hard-won vegetables. Home-grown organic produce is more nutritious because it is fresh, and all that exercise is an added bonus! Local wildlife will also benefit from your planting - but should bugs or birds eat half of your crop, console yourself with the Prophet's teaching (peace be upon him) that you earn spiritual reward for what they take.

If you're new to gardening, build your confidence by planting cress or rocket in a window box. They provide almost instant rewards for minimal effort. Lettuce, potatoes, tomatoes and carrots are all great for beginners. Start with your favourites and soon you'll be swapping bumper crops with fellow growers. Home-grown food is both *halal* and *tayyab*, and you will know exactly what has gone into it. When friends come for dinner, you may find yourself remarking with deep satisfaction, "I grew that carrot myself." And that new-found sense of appreciation and gratitude for humble fruit 'n veg is priceless.

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