

# ecoIslam

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

(Qur'an 4:135)



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www.ifees.org.uk

"The creation of the heavens and the earth is a far greater matter than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know it."

(Qur'an 40:57)

## Shock as GM declared 'halal'

Genetically modified (GM) crops are grown on over a billion hectares of farmland across the world and the biotech companies responsible are now targeting Muslim populations. The Shariah-compliance of GM is being discussed in a profit-motivated context, manipulating Islamic scholars into issuing highly controversial fatwas in support of GM. These discussions are failing to consider biotechnology from an Islamic perspective, ignoring not only the harm that GM causes to the environment but the way it undermines the integrity of God's creation.

### Modified halal

In December 2010, an international workshop for Islamic scholars was held in Penang, Malaysia on the theme, 'Agribiotechnology: Shariah Compliance.' The little-publicised event was not attended by any of the NGOs in Malaysia with a background in biotech issues. A web report claimed that the workshop was "attended by high-ranking ulama from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia and scientists from Malaysia, USA, Iran and Egypt." In fact, anyone with differing views from the organisers was not invited. The discussion was also limited to the halal/haram debate and, not surprisingly, resulted in a fatwa stating that GM is permissible in Islam.

The two-day workshop, organised by the Malaysian Biotechnology Information Centre and International Halal Integrity Alliance, concluded that genetic modification and GM products are halal as long as the sources from which they originate are halal. Exceptions are products derived from haram origin, which retain original characteristics that are not substantially changed. Furthermore, the fatwa makes the promotion of modern biotechnology and genetic engineering a fardh kifayah (collective obligation) because of their positive impacts on agriculture and the urgency of food security for Muslim populations. This resolution is clearly influenced by one-sided information about the benefits of biotechnology circulated by trans-national corporations and other vested interests.





# Global Issues

## The GM Controversy

...from cover page

This includes the myth that GM foods are being cultivated to feed poor communities whereas the crops are primarily designed to maximise profits. By focusing simply on the halal/haram origin of the gene used in genetic engineering, the workshop ignores fundamental issues in the Islamic worldview.

### The biotech worldview

Biotechnology is based on a worldview that sees nature in separate parts and not as an organic whole, linked by a web of relationships - organisms, forests, ecosystems, societies. Consequently a forest can be destroyed to plant cash crops without taking into account the ecological balance and the binding interdependence between plants, animals, micro-organisms and people.

### The Islamic worldview

The reductionism on which genetic engineering is anchored is clearly inconsistent with the holistic approach of the Qur'an:

And the earth We have spread out; set thereon mountains firm and immovable; **and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.**  
[Qur'an, 15:19]

It is the fracturing of nature's balance and harmony by profit-driven corporations that is responsible for some of the environmental disasters confronting us today.

Genetic engineering undermines the integrity of God's creation. This technology has the power to break down fundamental genetic barriers, not only between species, but also between humans, animals and plants. Gene engineers are now snipping, inserting, recombining, editing and programming genetic materials. Animal and even human genes are inserted into the chromosomes of plants, fish and animals creating unimaginable transgenic life forms<sup>1</sup>. These scientists are trying to alter the very nature, essence and qualities of God's creation in clear violation of the Qur'anic injunction:

... (Establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: **No change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah...** [Qur'an, 30:30]

The Qur'an has also warned about Satan's intentions to mislead mankind:

...And surely I will lead them astray, and surely I will arouse desires in them, and surely I will command them and they will cut the cattle's ears, **and surely I will command them and they will change Allah's creation.** Whoso chooseth Satan for a patron instead of Allah is verily a loser and his loss is manifest. [Qur'an, 4:117-119]

### Rethinking GM fatwas

Fatwas should not be issued on GM without a hard look at the costs and possible benefits, if any. GM foods have not been proven to improve food security for the world's poor. There is no credible evidence to show that genetic modification has increased yields, reduced pesticide use or improved food nutrition. In fact, the crops that currently dominate the GM market do not include any of the staple foods that could benefit the developing world.

Genetic engineering is also inherently dangerous on many levels, not least because it involves breaking down species barriers using recombined versions of genetic parasites. This has the potential to create hazards such as new drug-resistant viruses and diseases.

Given the nature of genetic engineering, its dangers and its failure to fulfil the claims of its proponents, it is shocking that Islamic scholars and Muslim scientists could grant it halal status, and make its promotion a collective religious obligation of the ummah.

Islamic scholars must be wary of being manipulated by the biotech industry to give religious legitimacy to its products, and realise how aggressively this industry is trying to penetrate foreign markets. At the very least, Islamic scholars should consult both the supporters and opponents of agribiotechnology before giving their opinion. Ultimately, genetic engineering should be evaluated in the light of the Qur'anic verses that underpin the Islamic worldview to judge whether it promotes the aims of the Shariah - the protection of religion, life, mind, and posterity.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**

Vice-president of the Consumer Association of Penang  
Malaysia

1. "What you should know about genetically modified foods", Consumer Association of Penang

Research has revealed that toxins implanted into GM food crops to kill pests are reaching the bloodstreams of women and unborn babies.

For findings please go to  
[www.gmwatch.org/index.php](http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php)

Also see - Aris A, Leblanc S. Maternal and fetal exposure to pesticides associated to genetically modified foods in Eastern Townships of Quebec, Canada. *Reprod Toxicol* (2011), doi:10.1016/j.reprotox.2011.02.004  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21338670](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21338670)

For a comprehensive overview of the GM issue see:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically\\_modified\\_food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically_modified_food)



# Editorial

## Genes and Atoms

Inquisitiveness and ingenuity have led the human species to the frontiers of knowledge and there are two aspects to this unravelling. The first is that we are learning that the world we live in is made up of the minute, the delicate, the intricate and the ephemeral and in spite of all our discoveries it remains mysterious. The more we know the more there is to know.

The other aspect is that this knowing has not always been an end in itself. Ever since our species began building settled communities we have used our knowledge of the seasons and the soil, and techniques of cross pollination and grafting to grow enough food for ourselves. We domesticated animals and improved breeding techniques to give us increasing yields of meat, milk and eggs. All these advances took place while working with the grain of nature. Nature always gave and it never asked for much in return except kindness - for our own sakes, as there is no separation between us.



Double Helix - the gene structure

Industrial farming took hold in Europe in the eighteenth century, but in the last century matters took a drastic turn when we discovered gene manipulation. If we include other advances in bio technology, hormone therapy, the economies of scale and our penchant for printing money we have an explosive mixture that is bound to lead us into unintended consequences. Thus we have mad cow disease as a result of making cannibals out of herbivores, and factory farming is reputed to be the 'biggest single source of cruelty to animals in the world'.

Genetically modified (GM) foods were introduced to the world in the 1990s. Like the people behind the mad cow debacle the corporations that market GM seeds appear to be concerned more with short-term profit than with long-term impacts. For example, there are real fears about pest-resistant GM crops causing species loss as this interferes with the food chain and has the potential to cause a decline in bird species. There are complex scientific, ethical and political issues to be explored and it is a puzzle how an unrepresentative group of ulema, however learned in the Islamic Sciences, can determine in a two-day conference held in Penang, Malaysia last December, that GM foods are halal and can be consumed by Muslims? (See leading article on P1).

Nuclear energy has always been surrounded by controversy, and it is regaining notoriety in the aftermath of the Japanese nuclear crisis. James Lovelock is a British scientist known for his Gaia hypothesis which sees the Earth as a living entity. Once popular with the greens, he alienated them by supporting 'clean' nuclear power as he believed that climate change was inevitable, and that the consumer model based on fossil fuels is resistant to change. However, the nuclear lobby's celebrations were short lived as there is now a reappraisal of this path to 'clean' energy. This also brings into question the wisdom of Muslim countries following the nuclear route.

Perversely, just as the dangers of going nuclear are becoming clearer, the world's already-threatened rainforests are being further endangered by bio fuels. As fossil fuel resources decline, vast areas of primeval forests will be destroyed and given over to bio fuel cropping thus creating more carbon dioxide to keep our economies functioning. We are trapped in a conundrum of our own making.

Accumulating knowledge is no guarantee of wisdom. Knowing how to split the atom and manipulate genes has not shown us why we should stop tearing the planet apart. Population pressure means more mouths to feed but there are safer and saner alternatives to GM food. While the nuclear option is being questioned once again, we also need a concerted push to bring renewable energy to the fore before the bio fuel industry destroys the Earth's remaining rainforests.



Atomic Blast

Our actions up to now only serve to underline the rapacious nature of the human species, our capacity for self delusion and the extent of our immaturity. As we take stock of ourselves, a healthy dose of humility would not go amiss. As the Qur'an says,

"The creation of the heavens and the earth is a far greater matter than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind do not know it." (Qur'an 50:47)

**Fazlun Khalid**

Founder of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science



### Water Ethics in Islam

Some people predict that future world wars will be fought over water. I believe, however, that water will provoke dialogue rather than conflict. Despite the general faith in scientific solutions there is no technological solution to obtaining abundant clean water for all. Ultimately it is human behavior which will determine the degree of pollution or preservation of our planet.

Islamic law and ethics, Shariah, takes a principled approach to human problems. However, there are no direct rulings about international water laws or global warming. Although the Qur'an and hadith do not discuss specific solutions, they do provide general guidelines for water usage and management based on principles such as equity, fair share, priorities and protection of life.

International water laws deal with four quantitative and qualitative aspects: territorial state sovereignty, integrity of water resources, equitable utilization, and no significant harm. Shariah, on the other hand, facilitates regional water codes based on local customary practices ('urf) and public benefit (*masalih*). Shariah and international law are complimentary systems not competing acts. There are five fundamental issues discussed in Islamic teachings on water.

**Water ownership** is a central issue and historically individuals were not considered to be owners of water unless it was enclosed in a container. Although theoretically water is owned by God, every person has fundamental water rights. Modern states such as Saudi Arabia position themselves as water trustees for the public good (*masalih*) and administer water distribution, quality, quantity and recharge. This expanded stewardship role of modern governments is evident in recent fatwas issued by Saudi and Indonesian Islamic legal scholars on water and environmental concerns.

**Equity** is at the heart of water rights in Islam. People are given water based on their individual and communal needs. A farmer with one hundred acres of land and another owning a single acre are not given the same amount. In many hadith upstream land owners are warned from withholding superfluous water - balancing the communal right against individual rights of ownership and priority.

**Water usage** has a general list of priorities. For example, priority is given to water usage near the source for maximum benefit to agriculture in pre-industrial farming practices. Generally, human needs are given priority over animals, followed by agricultural use then industrial and recreational use. However, a threatened ecosystem where species face extinction may require a re-evaluation of this priority or an alternative water source to mitigate environmental harm.

**Distribution (*shirb/shafa*):** The right to drink and to irrigate land is safeguarded by Shariah given that there are no adverse impacts to the ecosystem.

**Management:** Water sovereignty or management can only be effective if water policies are unambiguous, equitable, and enforced without bias. It is also essential to recognise the customary practices ('urf) of a people. Basing management on the Shariah principle of removing hardship helps mitigate environmental stress and facilitates equitable use of natural resources.

An integrated approach to water, using Shariah guidelines, would help in water management and allocation in areas which might be more resistant to 'foreign' conservation models. A top-down approach would delineate clear rulings enforced by law such as ordinances and environmental fatwas, and a bottom-up approach would lead to more comprehensive public environmental education programs based on cultural sensitivity and regional codes. It is important for environmentalists to recognise that success on the broader environmental front in the Muslim world is conditioned upon public support on water issues.

#### Faraz Khan

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## German-Algerian support for 'Green Islam' awareness

"A religion that is against nature will not last," says Ahmed Bouzbid, Imam of the Salah Bay Mosque in the old center of Annaba, Algeria. He is one of twenty-four Imams and Qur'an teachers participating in a training programme on biodiversity and environmental protection held by the German-Algerian Development Cooperation.

The coastal city of Annaba was chosen in 2007 as a pilot region to raise environmental awareness through religious leaders. Their important position within society and their outreach through mosques and Quran schools was believed to be a valuable asset in the quest for a sustainable use of natural resources. The Ministry of Religious Affairs together with its German partners developed a manual entitled "The role of mosques in environmental education". This book, which was developed by Islamic scholars at the University of Algiers, explains the position of Islam on nature and the environment, using Qur'anic verses and hadith. Among its messages it puts an emphasis on the earth being entrusted to humans by God to utilize it responsibly, because "waste is a sin" (Qur'an 7:31). Over the past few years it has become an important tool for Imams in their Khutbas.

The book has helped to change people's behavior in Annaba and has led to a more conscious approach to their environment. Today, the manual is used throughout the country and is known beyond the borders of Algeria.



Algerian Imams participating in environmental training



Cover of 'The role of mosques in environmental education'



Due to this successful project the German-Algerian development cooperation represented by the National Programme for Integrated Environmental Management and GIZ Programme Office "Intercultural Relations with Muslim Countries" continued their cooperation on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) with the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In 2010, international year of biodiversity, a textbook on biodiversity was developed for Qur'an schools in an innovative collaboration between Algerian scientists and Muslim scholars. It teaches pupils the importance of biodiversity for a sustainable environment and the maintenance of livelihoods. The book also explains the influence of humans on ecosystems and the atmosphere, the links between pollution and disease and the diversity of life.



Biodiversity explained in the environmental handbook

The scientific facts on biodiversity are again backed up by arguments based on Islamic religious sources.

Twenty Qur'an school teachers in Annaba were trained in the application of the textbook during 2010, and some 2,000 students were taught the subject in a number of schools.

The success of the textbook called for wider distribution, an idea strongly supported by H.E. Bouabdallah Ghoulamallah, the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs. The textbook will therefore be introduced in the west Algerian city of Tlemcen in 2011. The city has been designated the Capital of Islamic Culture 2011 and through the official festivities and many guests from foreign countries the biodiversity textbook will be shared across the Muslim world.

### Jenny Bednarek

GIZ Programme Office Intercultural Relations with Muslim Countries

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is owned by the Federal Republic of Germany. Through its operations around the globe, it supports the German government in the fields of international cooperation for sustainable development and international education.



# Global Roundup

## News and Events

### SCHOOLS4TREES

IFEES' much heralded SCHOOLS4TREES programme was launched in Indonesia on 23rd December 2010. Islamic boarding school children from Pesantren Husnayain 2, in Sukabumi, West Java planted nine species of trees on a hectare of land in the Gunung Halimun-Salak National Park.

The head of the school, KH Chalil Ridhwan, said that although this was a small initiative it had great potential to be replicated worldwide and he invited all schools to participate in the project. He also thanked British Muslims for their support and praised IFEES for their foresight in initiating this programme.

The project began after a great deal of research and consultation, thanks to Fachruddin Mangunjaya, IFEES' representative in Indonesia. It is being implemented in collaboration with the Gedepahala Consortium, Conservation International and the Indonesian National Park Authority.



Students from Pesantren Husnayain 2, Sukabumi, West Java



Fazlun Khalid (l) with Nana Firman (r) - environmental ethics training for teachers in Surabaya, Java



Teachers in training in Surabaya, Java

### CLIMATE4CLASSROOMS

Climate4Classrooms (C4C) is an international partnership programme between the British Council, the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Meteorological Society. C4C is a response to the lack of relevant teaching materials on climate change and it delivers innovative resources with cross-cultural perspectives for schools around the world.

IFEES was invited by the British Council to contribute to C4C in Indonesia. IFEES founder, Fazlun Khalid, assisted by Nana Fitriana, delivered two workshops on Islamic environmental ethics in Java and Surabaya on 21st and 22nd March 2011 respectively. Ejaz Qureshi, chairman of the IFEES board of trustees, said that this approach by international institutions posed an interesting challenge to Muslims globally and urged them to play their full part in resolving climate change issues which pose a serious threat to the lives of future generations.



# Global Roundup

## News and Events

### IFEES breaks new ground in West Africa

IFEES' growing reputation for developing the teaching of Islamic environmental ethics has now reached West Africa. In a ground-breaking workshop, Fazlun Khalid, founder of IFEES, conducted a two-day training session on environmental ethics based on the Qur'an. The training was supported by the British Council and the Alliance for Religion and Conservation.

The event took place on the 14th and 15th March 2011 and was attended by Islamic scholars and Qur'an school teachers from the Kano region of northern Nigeria. Participants were trained to develop techniques of disseminating environmental messages to their communities in a short space of time and also learnt how to devise projects in keeping with local conditions. Participant feedback has been very positive and confirms the need to reach out, wherever Muslims live, in order to deal with climate change issues as a matter of urgency.



Islamic environmental ethics workshop participants in Kano, Nigeria

IFEES also played a leading role in the founding of the Nigerian Islamic Council for the Environment (NICE) in Kano. A steering committee was set up on 16th March to continue developing the organisation. Fazlun Khalid also presented a paper entitled "The Environment - the emerging dimension of Islamic education" at the international conference on the Contributions of Islamic Scholars to Education hosted by Bayero University, Kano. These events were supported by the British Council.

### Ghana climate change workshop for Islamic leaders



Al Haji Dr. Usman Nuhu Sharbutu, chief imam of Ghana

A workshop on the role of Muslim leaders in combating climate change was held at the Islamic Conference Center in Accra, Ghana on the 27th December 2010. The event, titled 'The emerging threats of climate change; the role of Muslim leaders in combating the menace', was organised by the Office of the National Chief Imam of Ghana and sponsored by the British Council.

The workshop was attended by the national chief imam of Ghana, Alhaji Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharbutu, ten regional imams as well as respected Muslim scholars and a youth group.

IFEES' representative in Nigeria, Ahaji Usman Modibbo, spoke to participants about the importance of mobilising Muslims around the world by raising awareness of Islamic teachings on stewardship of the environment.

Mr Chris Gordon, Acting Director of the Institute of Environment and Sanitation Studies, University of Ghana warned that production of cocoa in Ghana would become impossible if predicted temperature changes came to pass. He said that slowing the rate of deforestation was the cheapest and one of the most effective ways to combat climate change.

The Imams were urged to include climate change messages in their Friday sermons in mosques to increase awareness among the Muslim community. Follow-up capacity training sessions are planned in 2011 for all religious leaders, and education and development officers in Ghana.



# Views and Reviews

## Food for Thought

**GREEN SPIRITUALITY:** One answer to global environmental problems and world poverty.

Chris Philpott, Author House, Milton Keynes UK, 2011



The author, Chris Philpott, is a seasoned environmental campaigner and climate camper. This book took thirteen years to write and involved consultations with members of many different faiths. At the climate camp I attended, we had a candlelit interfaith discussion, seated in a circle on bales of straw with Christians, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Pagans and others. The book reflects teachings on nature and the importance of caring for the environment from a wide range of religious paths.

The Islamic contribution is included, thanks to IFEES among others, but

it seems a little weak in places compared with the very clear and concise guidance in the Qur'an. However, Chris invites people, if they 'can illuminate further', to leave a comment on his website [www.greenspirituality.org](http://www.greenspirituality.org). The foreword concludes, 'Chris Philpott helps us to rediscover the ecological and spiritual sheet anchor that we so desperately need at this most difficult of times.'

The first twelve chapters summarise the basic facts about twelve religions, including Shamanism, Paganism, Spiritualism and Baha'i, each with a section on its green manifestations, and a list of helpful websites. The next seven chapters look closely at waste and poverty, species extinction, climate and misuses of water, food and air - with warnings and exhortations from various religious sources. Each chapter ends with a substantial list of suggestions for actions readers can take.

The evidence for religious teachings being green seems to be overwhelming. Chris has done a thorough job, including many converging viewpoints which challenge today's attitudes that are divorced from our dependence on divine provision via the planet's over-exploited resources. The final chapter, 'You are the Emergency Services,' calls on everyone to do their bit, saying, 'We have all slipped from these ideals, and understandably, but we can use the spiritual ideals contained in all these religious teachings 'to reinstate ... in each one of us a spirituality that is green.'

Harfiah Haleem

## Sounds of the divine CD calls for a greener world

With all the government action, UN conferences and grassroots work around the world, humankind has yet to make significant progress in addressing environmental issues. Terms such as 'climate change fatigue' are now used by even the staunchest environmentalists, illustrated by the over-exposed image of the polar bear.

Earth Guardians teamed up with the Leicester City Council Sustainability Team to come up with a creative environmental message that could be heard repeatedly without losing impact. The result is Q67:15, an audio CD of Qur'anic verses and hadith relating to the environment.

The director of the Sustainability Team, Neville Stork, spent his childhood years in a Muslim country and holds a great affinity for the Qur'an and its recitation.

In early 2010 the project began with the aim of producing a message which, thanks to the timeless eloquence of the Qur'an, would remain fresh and engaging time after time. After researching and categorising the relevant verses and hadith, Neville Stork, my good friend Hafiz Abu Bakr Gassama of Gambia and I proceeded to the sound studio to record the CD.

The title of the production refers to the following verse:

"It is He who made the earth submissive to you, so walk its broad trails and eat what it provides. The Resurrection is to Him." (Qur'an 67:15)

Leicester council distributed Q67:15 to politicians, community leaders, Imams and Muslim leaders. The feedback received so far has been very positive, and I look forward to more comments and suggestions. I hope to re-record the CD this year with some changes and improvements. The audio will also be made available for digital upload for mp3 players and smartphones, so that the message can be heard on the move anywhere in the world.

If you would like further information, or wish to obtain a CD, please do get in touch via email.

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Earth Guardians

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Earth Guardians (Leicester UK) promotes the conservation and protection of the environment through campaigns, raising awareness and relevant community projects.



The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences is dedicated to the maintenance of the Earth as a healthy habitat for future generations of humankind and other living beings.

Please support us generously so that we may multiply this work during these critical times.

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