Muslim Centres in Europe

In the last decades, Muslim centres have been established all over Western Europe. Apart from being centres of religious, social, and cultural activities, the intention is often to establish and maintain relationships with non-Islamic surroundings, such as local governments, churches, and schools. Through these institutional embodiments, active spokesman try to meet the needs of Muslims as citizens of host societies. Islamic centres in Europe thus play an important role in the emancipation of Muslim communities. The ISIM Newsletter is now launching a series of articles on Muslim centres in Europe, the first of which is authored by Mamoun Mobayed, director of The Belfast Islamic Centre in Northern Ireland, introducing his centre.

Three generations of Muslims outside Belfast Islamic Centre.

Islamic News Letter 6/00

Three

Muslims in Northern Ireland: The Belfast Islamic Centre

The Muslim Community

It is difficult to know when the first Muslims arrived in Northern Ireland, but there are some indications that this was in the 1940s. We know that some Muslims celebrated Eid al-Fitr in 1953 at a small house on Cromwell Street in Belfast. Early Muslims were mainly students from the Indian subcontinent, South Africa and the Middle East, studying at Queens University of Belfast.

The Muslim Community has grown in size since then. There is no accurate statistical information on the exact number of Muslims, but the estimate is approximately 3000. The majority live in Belfast, while the rest are in Craigavon, Londonderry, Ballymena, Coleraine, Bangor and Lisburn. They belong to different ethnic groups from Pakistan, India, Middle East, Africa, Malaysia, Gulf, Turkey and others. There are also small numbers of Irish/British that have recently become Muslims, yet have not formed a unified community. All of these Muslims are fully integrated together by sharing of mosques and Sunday school (madrasa) yet they have diverse cultural traditions and customs. Many of the Muslims have either Irish and/or British citizenship, some of them through marriage. Since Northern Ireland did not bring over cheap labourers, as is the case with England, France and Germany, for example, the majority of the Muslims are professionals who decided to come voluntarily. They work in medicine, university teaching, engineering, or business. The students form the biggest group among the non-residents. It is a young community, as they represent the upcoming third generation. These factors make it possible to prevent some social, educational and economical difficulties which are faced by Muslim communities elsewhere in Europe.

Belfast Islamic Centre

The current centre, such as established in the early 1980s, and it serves the Muslims in Northern Ireland. It is registered as a charity organization, and has a mosque, a small Islamic library, a few rooms for teaching, and a section for women. It holds the usual activities of a mosque and an Islamic centre, ranging from worship, Quranic teaching, Ift prayers and celebrations, as well as social and cultural activities. It holds a Monthly Meeting when a guest speaker is invited. On the first Sunday after Eid al-Fitr, the Centre holds the Annual Eid Dinner when many non-Muslim friends of Belfast Islamic Centre are invited, including the Lord Mayor of Belfast.

The Centre has a Sunday school (madrasa) called Dar al-Uloom, where Muslim children attend three sessions: Quran, Islamic Studies and Arabic language.

Belfast Islamic Centre has a Women’s Group which organizes various activities or training for the Muslim women in Northern Ireland. Belfast Islamic Centre also has a popular website.

The Centre has established good relationships with the Northern Irish Community, The Muslim Community in Northern Ireland has certain features which distinguish it from other Muslim minorities in Europe. Since Northern Ireland did not bring over cheap labourers, as is the case with England, France and Germany, for example, the majority of the Muslims are professionals who decided to come voluntarily. They work in medicine, university teaching, engineering, or business. The students form the biggest group among the non-residents. It is a young community, as they represent the upcoming third generation. These factors make it possible to prevent some social, educational and economical difficulties which are faced by Muslim communities elsewhere in Europe.

Notes

1. Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah.
3. The address of the website: www.iol.ie/~afifi
4. Maurice Ryan (1996), Another Ireland
5. Maurice Ryan (1996), Another Ireland
6. Dr Mamoun Mobayed, is an Associate Psychiatrist, lecturer, author and President of Belfast Islamic Centre.