

# SEEKING UNITY AT THE GRASS-ROOTS

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## MECCA CONFERENCE OF WORLD MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS

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# Seeking Unity at the Grass-roots

By Khurshid Ahmad

Mecca, the spiritual capital of Islam, has been the venue of the latest Islamic moot, in this century, third major Islamic conference in Mecca in the present century. First international conference of the Muslim people was held in the Holy City in 1926. The second major conference was held at the founding of the Rabita in 1961. The 1974 Conference is the third such event. Some two hundred and fifty delegates representing Muslim organisations all over the world gathered at the invitation of the Rabita al-Alam al-Islami to discuss their common problems and to explore the ways and means for Muslim Unity at a more popular level. The conference was organised in close sequence to the historic Islamic Summit held in Lahore (Pakistan) in February, 1974. If the Lahore summit symbolised efforts towards Muslim unity at the Government level, the Makkah conference was a step towards the unity of the Muslim peoples. The Secretary-General of the Rabita, Shaikh Saleh al-Gazzaz, underlined this relationship when he said in his opening address that 'this conference would try to follow up the recommendations of the Lahore Islamic summit'. It aims at 'widening the area of collaboration and cooperation among the Muslims'.

The five-day conference (6-10 April) was convened at Mecca. Proceedings began with an impressive inaugural session in which about seven hundred delegates, observers and guests were present. The inaugural address was given by Prince Fawaz bin Abdul Aziz, the Governor of Makkah who set the tone by suggesting that 'Muslims are engaged all over the world in a just struggle but they can emerge victorious only if they are also united'.

Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Harakan, Minister of Justice, Government of Saudi Arabia presided over the conference. In his presidential address he surveyed the Muslim situation in general and the challenges that confront them in particular. He emphasised the need to "hold fast to the ideals and tenets of the Holy Quran and Sunnah" in matters of approach as well as in the conduct

of affairs in all walks of life.

Sheikh Saleh al-Gazzaz, focussed on the major Muslim problems and the need to develop a unified approach to them. Elaborating the theme of the conference he said that the conference should try to evolve 'a plan for the coordination of Islamic activities all over the world so that we may be able to achieve maximum results with minimum of waste and duplication'.

The last speaker of the evening was Dr. Tawfiq Owadah, Director Supreme Islamic Council of Egypt. He spoke on behalf of the delegates and made a number of suggestions for the establishment of a central secretariat to coordinate the activities of world Muslim organisations.

The next three days were given to intense committee work and a number of open sessions devoted to discussing the problems and issues concerning the Muslim World. The conference was divided into five committees on: (a) Islamic Da'wah: means and methods; (b) Contemporary ideologies; (c) Palestine and other Problems of the Muslim world; (d) Muslim minorities and their problems; and (e) Coordination of Islamic work. These committees made in-depth study of their specific areas of inquiry. The conference secretariat had circulated working papers pin-pointing sensitive areas of inquiry and surveying the major

problems that confront the Muslims. The reports of different committees were presented in the last open session of the conference held on the 10th April. They not only presented a clear statement of the contemporary Muslim situation but also projected in a crystallised form, the present day thinking of the Muslim leadership vis-a-vis these problems.

The open sessions were addressed by Muslim leaders from different parts of the world. Abu Hisham of al-Fatah spoke on the Palestine problem, Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, President Azad Government of Jammu and Kashmir, focused on the now forgotten Kashmir problem. Muslim problems and situations in Philippines, South Yemen, Eritrea, Chad, Albania, Bulgaria and Cyprus figured prominently in speeches at the open sessions.

Situation reports were presented by delegations from Libya, Canada, Algeria, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, etc.

Dr. Muhammad Natsir, former Prime Minister of Indonesia addressed the concluding session and made a fervent plea for the rationalization of Muslim activities and unflinching dedication to the ideal of Islamic revival.

A notable feature of the conference was participation by a large number of organisations including Al Akhwan al Muslimoon.

The conference resolved to estab-

lish a central coordinating committee with the Rabita at Mecca to achieve greater cooperation between the activities of Muslim organisations all over the world. The committee will have adequate representation from all continents and one representative of international Islamic organisations. A number of resolutions were passed on different Islamic issues, including Palestine, Kashmir, Muslims in Philippines, East Pakistan, South Yemen, etc. The reconstruction of education in the Muslim countries as well as in Muslim minority areas reigned prominently in the discussions and resolutions.

All delegates to the conference flew to Riyadh to meet Malik Faisal who welcomed them and assured them of his fullest support. Replying to an address presented on behalf of the delegates by Mr. Kamel Shareef he asked not to be addressed as *Jalalatul Malik* (His Exhausted Majesty) because *Jalalah* was an attribute of God alone. For him it was a great honour to be the servant of the holy places.

Looking upon this conference similar other international assemblies held recently one can sense the emergence of a new approach in inter-Muslim relationship. Islam is being looked at not merely as the legacy of a golden past but also as a rallying point for the present day Muslims and as an ideology which is capable of solving the complex problems of the present age. The contemporary Muslim society is not in a good shape, but the solution of its problems does not lie outside the pale of Islam. Secularism and communism both have failed to solve the problems of man. Islam has a more positive role to play in the making of the humanity. To play that role Muslims must develop themselves intellectually, educationally, economically and technologically as also morally and ideologically. They have to develop their societies in such a way that they absorb the best of science and technology in their own socio-ideological framework. Then only can they play a more positive role in the world. And this is the feeling that the Mecca conference has helped to strengthen and develop.

