

Yemeni prisons and crisis of human conscience

By MOHAMED BIN SALLAM
YEMEN TIMES STAFF

SANA'A- Oct. 25- For years, as Ramadan draws nearer, the different media means discuss the formation of a committee to view the condition of prisons and prisoners in all the Yemeni governorates.

In every Ramadan, there is an official announcement about the scores of prisoners who will be released and donations in millions, often said to be paid by the President of the Republic to solve the problem of prisoners on debts, blood money and the likes.

During the opening days of Ramadan, a report issued by the Parliamentary committee for human rights and freedoms after a series of visits to prisons revealed a flagrant scandal on the sufferings of prisoners whose families and children suffer from the lack of a leader and exacerbation of poverty and difficult living conditions.

The report stated that according to records of the Sana'a Central Prison, there are 1934 prisoners, of whom 53 are women, 47 juvenile prisoners and 12 children who accompany their imprisoned mothers.

According to the report, 190 prisoners

in the Sana'a Central Prison and 800 ones in other prisons at the level of the republic are convicted of robbery and violations against the public interest. Many of them have finished the sentences on them but still in prisons as they have not restored what they took.

The report adds: "some of them have passed the sentence period and still in jail until they submit what is required from them. It is made clear that the majority of prisoners are from the needy and poor families who are unable to repay what is on them. How their problems can be solved is unclear."

How can they submit what is required from them while they are jailed? And, is there any legitimate or legal justification the courts rely on while issuing such rulings?

The Parliamentary report went on, "This type of punishment is doubled and its impacts become worse. Some prisoners have no children and families to support them and it has become apparent that these prisoners are the only sustainers of their families and children."

The report indicated there are many prisoners who are waiting trials and then landed in prisons until the court looks into their cases. The intervals between court sessions that can reach months and

years. There are many prisoners who have exceeded two years in jail without being tried; they were landed in prison under the order of the general attorney, investigation bureau, or under the instructions of social personalities.

The report confirmed that members of the committee were notified by the Sana'a Central Prison authorities that the President of the Republic denoted 200 million riyals to pay for the debts and blood money on prisoners, but unfortunately such a mount of money was not used for this purpose.

The report mentioned, "We are now in another Ramadan and the presidential committee that is authorized every year to visits prisons promised to secure the release of prisoners, but until now no one was freed. We were notified that around 70 million riyals of the sum donated by the President in Ramadan three years ago has not been used yet.

In its report, the committee pointed out that 60% of the total number of prisoners in the Sana'a Central Prison are detained on murder and banditry cases. Procedures of their trials were prolonged to reach 2 years without issuing the final verdict. It added there are murder cases on which death sentences were issued but no execution of the verdict was seen. Such pro-

longed procedures resume conflicts and quarrels between the people concerned.

The committee noticed there is a contradiction between the authorities of prison and the authorities of the general attorney regarding the execution of verdicts. The prison bylaw gave the director of any prison the authority to immediately release any prisoners at the end of his/her imprisonment term while the executive bylaws of the general attorney state that directors of prisons should notify the attorney offices when the imprisonment term of defendant comes to an end, and then to take an written note on the release of prisoner. These two viewpoints resulted in the prolonging of case-related procedures and imprisonment terms. They cancelled the role of prison administrations and discharged their responsibility from caring for the rights of prisoners.

The Shura Council's committee disclosed that there are multinational prisoners (Ethiopians, Iraqis, Sudanese and others) who have been imprisoned for months with being transferred to the judiciary. Their imprisonment terms has ended and they are still detained. Besides, there are Ethiopian female prisoners who can not speak Arabic and, therefore, can not express the nature of their problems,

some of them were brought from the criminal investigation bureau and no attention drawn to their cases although they have been jailed for a long time. There are some women jailed for suspicion of privacy, a case which is not labeled as a crime under the law.

Officials in the penitentiary told the committee there are 800 prisoners from all around the republic detained for thefts, dishonesty, most of them faced imprisonment sentences and wrote down pledges to return what is upon them. Some of them appear to be unable to repay what they have taken.

Letters and complaints coming from prisons and penitentiaries all over the republic have recently increased. In these letters and complaints prisoners mentioned there are flagrant human and legal violations committed against them. They are subjected to malpractices and maltreatment by influential people and suffer a lack of basic services in prisons. These prisons are crowded with prisoners, exceeding their capacity.

Iraqi prisoners:

In the Capital's Central Prison, Mohamed al-Fadhli, an Iraqi refugee complained that he is ever subjected to torture by electric tools and harsh beating.

In his letter, he said he lost his virility because of recurrent beatings on his testicles and his sense of hearing because of beating on his head. Al-Fadhli further shouted that he intends to file a suit against the Yemeni government to the International Criminal Court.

The security authorities in the Sana'a Central Prison have detaining Iraqi nationals holding refuge cards from the Higher Commissioner for Refugees' Affairs. According to their expressions, they are subjected to flagrant violations and maltreatment. As a result, a detainee in the name of all appealed to the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan to intervene in order to rescue them.

"We are Iraqi prisoners who are thrown in the Yemeni Nazi Detention and appeal to Kofi Anan, UN Secretary General to take a quick action to save us and our families from terrorism and oppression practiced against us. These malpractices are clear violations against human rights and kinds of social discrimination," said the detainee.

"The Yemeni constitution is merely ink on papers and no one works in compliance with it, and verdicts are issued in the light of tribal considerations and compliments."

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Yemen's criminal enterprise

By: JANE NOVAK
FOR YEMEN TIMES

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh is scheduled to visit the United States in November for a round of meetings with President Bush and other high ranking US officials. As the representative of the Yemeni people, Saleh deserves a great deal of respect and hospitality. Yet it has become increasingly apparent that the regime, under the total domination of President Saleh, is engaged in a wide variety of criminal activities to the detriment of regional stability and the Yemeni people themselves.

Drug Smuggling: One regionally destabilizing regime activity is drug smuggling. A variety of illegal drugs are smuggled via the Indian Ocean into the southern Yemeni governorate of Hadramawt. The drugs are then transported inland to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States under the supervision of a close relative of the president who is

also responsible for the governmental security apparatus, a well-informed former regime official reported. The Saudis regularly report seizing tons of drugs (as well as guns and other prohibited materials) from Yemeni smugglers.

The profits from many illegal transactions are thought to be laundered through real estate transactions by front companies in Dubai. Once laundered, the money finds its way to bank accounts in Europe, notably Germany.

Weapons Trafficking: Both the US and the UN have expressed concern regarding the amount of illegal arms transfers from Yemen. The Yemeni weapons pipeline has two sources of supply: the black market and legitimate military purchases.

Published reports have indicated that local gangs of arms traffickers in Serbia, Slovakia, Montenegro, Croatia and Kosovo ship weapons from the ports in Montenegro and Croatia to Yemen. Additionally some weapons purchased by the Yemeni military are diverted into the black market. The serial numbers for two assault rifles used in an attack on the U.S. consulate in Saudi Arabia have been traced to Yemen's Defense Ministry. Five U.S. consulate employees died in the attack.

Independent analyst Shaun Overton noted, "Many people believe that Yemeni military officers bear responsibility for the distribution of weapons in

the country. Arms can flow legally into Yemen for the legitimate purpose of supplying the army." The poorest nation in the Arab world, Yemen is among its top weapons purchasers. The rise in Yemen's military budget, which tripled from 1998 to 2003, corresponds with an increase in weapons trafficking activity, an enterprise reputedly supervised by a close relative of President Saleh who is a top military leader.

The Yemeni weapons pipeline illegally supplies weapons to various groups in the Sudan, Somalia, Palestine, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and to al-Qaeda. According to Elaph, an Arabic website, "The Saudis were very furious as the latest battles with terrorists in Saudi Arabia revealed that all weapons and explosives used by the Qaeda fighters were bought and smuggled from Yemeni arms markets." An Israeli military intelligence official said "The weapons are smuggled by private gangs but with full knowledge of the authorities."

Illegal transfers are also made directly by the military. A recent UN report noted that the Yemeni government had admitted sending 5000 "personal weapons" to the government of Somalia despite a U.N. weapons embargo. The weapons were delivered by the Yemeni Air Force. The report also noted a much larger deal brokered between Yemen and Somalia that included rocket

launchers, anti-tank weapons, shoulder-fired missiles and other armaments. Previously, Yemeni tanks discovered in the Sudan were disavowed by the Yemeni government. In August, the Yemeni military banned journalists from reporting on military topics without prior approval.

Support of Terrorists: It is no secret that al-Qaeda affiliated members of the Yemeni military and security forces are aiding terrorists. A Yemeni government official stated that "subversive" (al-Qaeda) elements of Yemen's secret service have established training camps for Iraqi Baathists who later fight in Iraq. Military analyst James Dunnigan wrote recently, "There are many al Qaeda sympathizers in the Yemeni military and government as well. These sympathizers have been discreetly aiding Iraqi Baath Party officials who have fled Iraq, and now Syria. There has also been some active, but covert, support for the terrorists operating in Iraq."

Dunnigan's assessment corresponds with that of former Yemeni ambassador to Syria, Ahmed Abdullah al-Hasani, who recently requested political asylum in London. A former commander of Yemen's navy, al-Hasani stated at a press conference that "al-Qaida elements are at the top in Yemen, in the army and political security forces." Yemeni Socialist Party lawmaker Mohammed Salah, said "The govern-

ment deals with terrorists in a way to keep them under their control, to use them when it needs to," the AP reported. Of 144 bank accounts in Yemen designated in 2004 by the U.N. as related to al-Qaeda or the Taliban, Yemen has

frozen one. It has not restricted the activities or finances of U.S. classified "Major Terrorist" Sheik Zindani, who remains a prominent politician and businessman.

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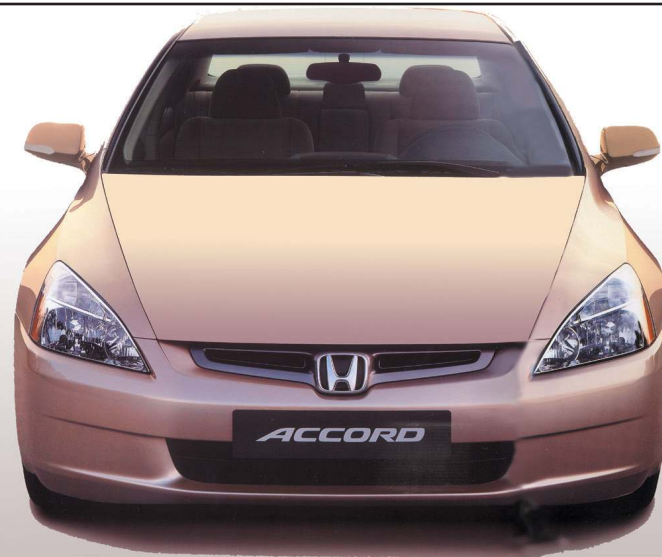
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Yemeni prisons and crisis of human conscience

Detainees described their life in Yemen jails as "a life in the neighborhood of beasts where inmates are denied their legal rights. Life in the Yemeni prisons makes one lose hope, as there are prisoners who have been detained for 25 years"

They accused the High Commissioner for Refugee's Affairs in Sana'a of being mercenaries and intelligent agents with the political security. In their letter, published by al-Shura Net in the second half of Ramadan, the detainees said: "The High Commissioner for Refugees' Affairs has changed into an office for mercenaries because its employees and lawyers are mercenaries for the political security who always ask for bribery for doing anything."

The prisoners' letter invited human rights advocates to check the authenticity of their complaints, "if anybody visits us, he will find out material evidence of what he learns."

For its part, the Parliamentary committee for freedoms and human rights, accused the Parliament's board of halting the implementation of the current year's program, which assumed that prisons should be visited before Ramadan.

The Parliament board, then, notified members of the committee that the parliament's budget can not cover cost of paying visits to prisons. Some committee members announced their readiness and will to visit prisons in different Yemeni governorates at their expense.

Ahmad Saif Hashid, MP and member of the committee, denied that the financial expenses are reason behind the Parliament's rejection to order the committee to visit the Yemeni prisons. He expected the reason to be bad situations

of prisons and fear of exposing that to the public.

The Parliament board is still conserving its acceptance to members of the committee to visit prisons, even after they show their readiness to pay visits to prisons at their own expense.

System of hostages & women prisons in Yemen

The Parliamentary committee of rights and public freedoms revealed, in a report which it forwarded to the Parliament by the end of 2004, following a field visit by the committee to prisons in different governorates, there are hostages who spent several years in prisons.

In the same prisons, the security authorities detain citizens, among them children, who have been jailed for over 3 years without committing any crimes punishable under the law. These people have been put in prison as hostages on crimes committed by their relatives who are harbored by influential persons.

The report added: "we have found 26 hostages in Ja'ar Central Prison, the so-called 'Bahrain Prison' in Abyan, among them 2 children, one is 14-year old and the other is 16 year old. These two children have been detained over crimes committed by their relatives.

The report denounced the detention of children despite the fact that verdicts were issued against perpetrators in absentia and considered such acts as infringements of the law and violations against child rights and the international conventions approved by the government of Yemen.

Shawqi Abdullatif al-Qadi, MP, confirmed to the same source that the system

of hostages is an officially fixed case and that 3 hostages were detained in the Abyan Central Prison over a crime committed by a perpetrator who is harbored by an influential person. "When we met prison officials, they told us these victims are detained for relation of the murderer, alleging the security fear that revenge may be taken upon them", he said. "This justification incites laughter, as the murderer has other relatives upon whom revenge can be taken, and it has become apparent that the murderer is harbored by an influential person."

Al-Qadi denounced the intrusion of influential persons in course of legal procedures and harboring criminals and murders as such, "hinder the course of justice and incites revenge incidents"

On the other hand, the Parliamentary report insisted on prison officials to offer inmates kind and fair treatment and to prevent attacks and harassments against them, as well as to reconsider the case of detainees imprisoned for crimes committed by others.

The rights and freedoms committee's report came as a summary of field visits to prisons last year, but it was not forwarded to the Parliament to be to discuss its contents and take measures against violations.

Shawqi al-Qadi, a member of the committee expressed his concern over hindering activities of the committee and turning away from following its recommendations. "We do not know who benefits from hindering the committee's activities and delaying discussion of its report," he added.

He commented, "the Parliamentary reports pass through distillation stations

so that contents and expressions be modified, in addition to deleting what should be deleted." According to him, the Parliament's current bylaw stands as a barrier before the reports of committees, considering them as recommendations and are not directed to the concerned sides.

Among the barriers hindering implementation of the report is the absence of the concerned ministry and its staff. Shawqi al-Qadi, then insisted on the presence of the concerned party and not the concerned minister who can attend only for endorsing any proposals forwarded by MPs and said the minister is a political personality who can not understand anything of the report.

The Parliament board prevented the committee of rights and public freedoms from implementing its field program concerning visits of prisons this year under the pretext that the Parliament's budget can not cover the committee's expenses. However, sources in the committee confirmed that higher officials order the concealing of violations committed in prisons.

"We suggested to have visits to political security prisons, but our request was rejected. Then we went to Dr. Abdulwahab Mahmoud, who is responsible for activities of committees in the Parliament asking for a visit to ordinary prisons, but the matter was prolonged," he added. "So, we suggested to pay visits to prisons at our own expense and threatened to show the case to the public opinion, and Dr. Mahmoud then promised to reconsider the matter and provide the costs, but up until now nothing has been achieved.

Yemen's criminal enterprise

A recent study for the Center for Strategic and International Studies by Anthony Cordesman found that 17% of foreign fighters in Iraq were likely Yemeni. This figure does not account for fighters of other nationalities trained in Yemen. Twenty suicide bombings in Iraq were perpetrated by Yemenis, reported al-Thawry newspaper. Two individuals charged with involvement in the Cole bombings who "escaped" along with eight other suspects were later reported to have carried out suicide bombings in Iraq which resulted in dozens of deaths.

Beyond training and support, there is reportedly an established terrorist transit route through Yemen to Iraq. A Saudi source recently told the London based Saudi paper Asharq Alawsat that generally, "A young man decides he wants to fight in Iraq, illegally enters Yemen, travels to Syria, and is subsequently smuggled across the border into Iraq."

Counterfeit Money: The Central Bank of Yemen distributed a substantial amount of forged currency to its clients. Confirmed as forgeries by the Yemeni police, the bogus currency distributed by the Taiz branch of the Yemen Central Bank was in both Saudi and Yemeni denominations, according to al-Wahdawi news. Counterfeit Saudi riyals are thought to be regularly smuggled into Saudi Arabia to be exchanged with authentic denominations.

Adel al-Dhahab, the lawyer who had handled counterfeiting cases for the Reserve Bank of Yemen in 2004, reported that some of the counterfeit money stored for protection by the Reserve Bank was stolen (and presumably recirculated) by a high ranking official in the Ministry of the Interior, until the prosecutor was forced to stamp every bill as counterfeit to prevent such practices. Mr. al-Dhahab also confirmed that the Central Bank is used as a mechanism of transferring and investing the personal funds of top officials overseas.

Diesel Smuggling: Researcher Sarah Philips reported that a well-informed ex-parliamentarian from the ruling General People's Congress (GPC), said that "high-ranking regime officials smuggled large quantities of subsidized diesel from Yemen's southern ports to the Horn of Africa, transferring at least 20 to 30 percent of the public money used to pay for the subsidies into their own pockets." She found that at a time when imports of other products (including diesel consuming machinery) decreased slightly, "the rapid increase in Yemen's diesel imports makes a circumstantial case" for large scale smuggling.

Mr. Abduljabar Saad, Under Secretary of the Finance Minister, in his resignation letter dated August 16, 2005 objected to widespread corruption throughout the ministry. He also noted the large increase in publicly subsidized

diesel intended for the Yemeni public and he stated with a fair amount of certitude that it "is being smuggled to neighboring markets."

Chemical Weapons Use: It is questionable whether the Yemeni military's response to the Houthi rebellion was proportionate, reasonable, and justified. The primarily Shiite region of Sa'ada was decimated by a military force comprised of former Iraqi military men, Afghan Arabs, and Yemeni military personnel, under the leadership of General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a reputed al-Qaeda sympathizer and President Saleh's half brother. Persistent news reports and published interviews have charged that General Mohsen used gas as a weapon during the conflicts in Sa'ada.

Highly respected religious scholar Mohamed Almansour wrote a letter to President Saleh in March 2005 which stated, "We condemn all things that happened in the previous months such as excessive use of force by the Government forces and the use of internationally prohibited weapons." In May, Alquds Alarabia reported that rebel leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi said, "The government attacked us with internationally prohibited weapons like chlorine gas that caused an inability to breathe." He also referred to "colored gas." An article in the opposition newspaper al-Shoura in June listed the names of imprisoned children, including Bader Aldeen Abdula Moslih, who was described as "12 years old, very ill from nervous system and skin damage as a result of chlorine gas used by the army in the first war last year." In an Internet interview the same month, a Houthi partisan and purported eye witness described "some special missile which turns into many particles, yellow and then red. The cloud goes up slowly. When it explodes it is yellow, when the particles come down they are red." The cloud caused an inability to breathe, he reported.

Yahya al-Houthi, former Member of Parliament in the ruling party and brother of slain rebel leader Hussain al-Houthi, wrote in an email: "Most of the injured persons have died especially those who were hiding in Suleiman Cave. They were exposed to chemical gas...The area surrounding Suleiman Cave is still closed by the Army to prevent any one from taking samples to be analyzed by chemical weapon experts. The Army also burned all bodies in that area so they don't leave any evidence for the international community.

They used gas in the area of Alqari Mountain in the village of Neshoor...The result of the attack was the death of all 40 men who were protecting the area. The bodies of the dead still missing tell now. The government forces used the tanks to destroy the

graves so no one can find the dead bodies if he or she needs to look for any evidence." Certainly the Yemeni regime could put these allegations to rest by inviting international inspectors into the region which remains closed off.

Selling the Port: In a stunningly blatant act of economic malfeasance, the Yemeni government recently entered into a 30 year contract for the port of Aden with its largest competitor, Dubai Ports International (DPI). World Bank documents state that Dubai is in direct competition for container transshipment business with Aden. The port of Aden is located along international shipping routes, giving it a strong advantage over ports in Dubai which are 1600 miles away.

The majority owners of DPI also are the managers of the Jabal Ali free zone in Dubai. DPI will pay 83.5 million US dollars as a rent over 30 years for the Aden free zone, an area of 32 million square meters, effectively paying less than one penny per square meter in monthly rent. A Kuwaiti firm's substantially higher tender was rejected in favor of DPI.

Lufti Shatara, head of a Yemeni group in the UK who believes the DPI award contravenes Yemeni national interest, wrote in a letter to the World Bank, "With Dubai now involved in Jebel Ali, Fujirah, Djibouti and Jeddah, and about to sign a concession to take over container operations in Aden, the question must be asked, which of these ports will Dubai favour when it comes to investment and marketing to maximize their business? If Dubai's recent announcement that they will invest in new berths at Jebel Ali to reach a throughput capacity of 55 million TEU (twenty foot container) by 2030, while Aden is promised a capacity of 3.5 million TEU by 2035, the answer seems very clear."

While DPI's total investment in the port of Aden over 30 years is expected to be nearly 500 million US dollars, the company is permitted to sell 20% of its shares in the Yemeni market, raising \$100 million dollars initially from Yemeni investors to pay the rent, buy equipment, and fund operations.

Mr. Shatara indicated in his letter that he has "documents proving that the process involves corruption" and his group intends to sue the Yemeni Government to stop the concession from being given to DPI. The award of Aden Port to its competitor may have significant negative ramifications on the future economic development of Yemen, a country struggling with epidemic poverty and unemployment. It would seem that those Yemenis responsible for the deal, including President Saleh, were acting in self-interest or were grossly incompetent. Either way, the Yemeni people have had one of their most important resources rented for thir-

ty years with little in way of equitable return.

Summation: Basic services in Yemen are nearly non-existent and the basic needs of the Yemeni people are unmet, including clean water, medical care, and educational facilities. According to the UN World Food Program, almost half the people in Yemen do not have enough to eat. Half of Yemen's children are physically stunted from malnutrition by age five, and 46% never begin school. The southern, formerly Marxist region in particular has endured an administrative economic boycott as well as collective discrimination, exclusion, and vilification by the regime. The population of Yemen will be greater than that of Russia by 2050.

With the official and informal administration of Yemen so completely dominated by the president and his family, these criminal activities and enterprises must be laid squarely at the feet of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who warrants a reassessment by the Bush administration, especially in the context of an increasingly vocal, activist, and unified reform movement in Yemen. Yemeni intellectuals have described the regime as "The Government of Mass Destruction" and "An Unproductive Tyrant Regime." In power for 27 years, Saleh recently announced that he would not seek another term as president, but the continued repression of both the media and opposition parties belies this statement.

Only the Yemeni people can determine the future of Yemen. With the prospect of electoral regime change in the 2006 presidential election in Yemen, a wide variety of citizens, cutting across traditional fault lines, have joined forces to stand up for democracy and against the bloody onslaught of regime power. The unity of Yemen is demonstrated by this consensus: the people of Yemen deserve an authentic democratic state that nurtures, not starves, its children, and a transparent government that operates honestly and equitably in the public interest.

Yemeni civil society has been fighting for years for democracy and against extremist ideologies. Numerous Yemenis have detailed, workable, concrete solutions to the myriad of issues facing Yemen. The international community can trust in the capacity of the Yemeni people to craft a workable state out of the ruins left by Saleh. And it should look beyond the comfortable familiarity of a manageable tyranny to see that the citizens of Yemen, more than any other aggrieved party, are the primary victims of President Saleh.

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By Nisha

Half the World



Sisterhood, rivalry, enmity

We often come across two conflicting conclusions about women as a group: according to the first one, women are women's worst enemy. The other one eulogises the idea of sisterhood among women because they women.

I have heard these conclusions from a large number of people including colleagues who are trying to reach women as beneficiaries of development programmes or organize women to achieve some goals. A few months back, a male colleague used the first conclusion to justify one of my female colleague's hostility towards me. He went on to argue that since women are incapable of dealing with one-another's successes, men are needed to resolve their disputes and to organize them for concerted action. This conclusion comes from women as well. Though so far I have not heard any woman who is using this conclusion mention the need of having men to arbitrate and regiment women. On another occasion, a female colleague used the second conclusion when she said that at the end of the day all women face same problems, have the same fears, and are oppressed with same traditional responsibilities. She declared that it is this similarity of women's issues regardless of other factors that makes women naturally come to one-another's rescue.

The first conclusion is arrived at without challenging stereotype notions about women being incapable of reason, higher consciousness and wider perspective. The implicit assumption in this conclusion is that women lack the capacity to understand their situation and their needs, and they are so petty minded that they cannot effectively be united as women. It does not recognize that women are also ambitious and competing individuals. Characteristics like ambitiousness and competitiveness are generally attributed to men. Usually, when men display these characteristics they are regarded as go-getters or goal-driven. When the same characteristics are displayed by women, it is regarded as an outcome of natural jealousy and irrationality of women.

The second conclusion is arrived at without any consideration to circumstances of women and their loyalties to factors other than gender. That is, it does not recognize that women are socio-culturally and religiously, economically, and temperamentally divided human beings. This conclusion tends to camouflage differences rather than recognize them, understand them, address them, and transcend them for supporting one another on issues that may or may not be common to all women. It is based on an assumption that women by virtue of being women will automatically bond and create an ideal, egalitarian, mutually supportive solidarity-based environment to live and work together. This conclusion does not attempt to see that women, due to divisions such as race, class, religion, caste, nationality and so on, could have different perspectives on oppression that they suffer.

So, should we dismiss the first conclusion as irrelevant and regard a woman's animosity towards another woman as a mere (in)human tendency which may surface in any individual irrespective of gender. This not an easy decision to make. My experiences suggest that there are times when a woman simply views herself as a contender for a coveted position or status or recognition or any other returns that one may get by doing a certain kind of work. In such circumstances, she does whatever it takes to bring the other person down, including crafty manipulations, display of hostility, bad-mouthing behind the back, lying,

and many other unscrupulous acts. But this kind of behaviour is not exclusive to women. I have heard stories from women as well as men about how a particular male family member or a colleague collaborated with others against them or usurped the credit due to them or engaged in skulduggery to harm them.

It would be wise, therefore, to dismiss the first conclusion as nothing but a simplistic account of women's behaviour. But from the point of view of political work for women's rights one must also note that such behaviour does point out the need for greater consciousness-raising and working towards building what might be phrased as 'group aspirations'. It also shows that whenever such behaviour is displayed it calls for appropriate investigation, elucidation, and actions because often when one is faced with such behaviour from a woman, the tendency is not to act on it. Inaction on such behaviour, more often than not, is influenced by the same conclusion – a woman can't take another woman's success and it is termed as a 'natural' clash between women. Inaction ends up patronizing stereotyped conclusions about women.

What about the second conclusion? Should I dismiss that too and forget my experiences that it is indeed women who often come to support other women, especially in situations where institutionalised support mechanisms for women are limited or non-existent? To some extent I do subscribe to a group identity as a woman and possess a willingness to support other women. But there are also instances to recall which suggest that within this group identity exist classes. One's status in this group identity is often influenced by one's socio-economic and political location. That is, one's socio-economic and political status determines one's capacity to promote one's views. Many women holding privileged status do indulge in navel-gazing and regard their perspective as the representative perspective of all women. I have seen how some women who are from privileged background, individually or together, sabotage and undermine women who do not share that background.

The second conclusion too needs to be rejected for its failure to account for diversity among women. The hierarchy and differences among women need to be acknowledged. They are an inevitable part of social-political life. Denying them implies allowing a few women to continuously impose their ideas and views on women who are not in the position to espouse or promote their perspectives and decisions. Unwillingness to recognize differences also keeps many women who are not ready to give up their ideas and views from being part of a collective identity.

There is an increasing need to recognize the issue that women's solidarity is rooted in its concrete context. That is, women's identity is intertwined with several other social, cultural, economical, personal and aspirational, religious, national, historic and many other such issues and therefore women's solidarity must address the challenges arising from these divisions. Recognition of these differences does not mean that they be viewed as factors against the formation of broader solidarity and wider alliances on the basis of being women. It means recognizing that these factors put each woman in a different context, which affects her motivation to work together with other women. This recognition will help us see the needs to provide rightful space to all women to raise and address their specific issues and have wider and egalitarian participation and decision-making as a vital condition for a strong collective identity.

Ramadan and Islam in Malta

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Am I a muezzin in Malta? This expression is said by an exasperated speaker who is being ignored by his or her audience. An expression which probably stems from the observation that very few people in Malta, if any, are Muslim. The call of the muezzin there is assumed to fall on deaf ears.

However this assumption does not hold true any longer. There is nowadays a small but thriving Muslim community in Malta. It numbers a few thousands out of a national population of about 400 000. It also includes many expatriates hailing from all Muslim countries of Africa and the Middle East as well as Asia and Europe. The Muslims in Malta form a multicultural group. The individual members of this group retained the traditions and the customs of their

respective ethnic and cultural backgrounds. But at the same time, these differences have gradually combined to make one distinct community. Islam is, of course, the common denominator which holds the different members together. This unity and the manifestation of Islam are most evident during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Now that Ramadan has begun, the daily routines of people in Muslim societies change. However the Muslims in Malta are a minority, and a relatively new one at that, within a mostly Roman Catholic populace. Thus the everyday pace of everyday life is not affected on a national scale: people must still to go to work at normal working hours; children still need to go to school. This poses significant difficulties to Muslims who seek to fulfill all their rigorous religious obligations of fasting and prayers. Nonetheless, most manage to do just that, a behaviour admired even by many non-Muslims.

The Islamic Cultural Centre in Malta is the fulcrum around which all major religious activities turn. It was founded by the Islamic Call Society whose headquarters are in Tripoli, Libya. The Centre comprises the mosque, administrative offices, a primary school and the Imam's house. Since its cornerstone was laid by Colonel Mu'ammarr Al-Qadhafi, the Libyan head of state and leader of the Revolution, on 2nd July, 1978, the Centre has aimed at rendering service to the Muslim community in Malta by the performance of religious rites, the celebration of religious occasions as well as the promotion of the Arabic language and the Islamic culture. The Centre also aims at acquainting the general Maltese public with Islam while enhancing dialogue and cooperation for the benefit of all. The Centre's helping hands extend to the poor, the refugees and prisoners. The Islamic Centre is the most important meeting point for Muslims in the country.

At the end of Ramadan, the Centre organises the Eid el-Fitr festival. The adjacent primary school is allowed a

few days of holidays so that the students can celebrate the Eid with their families. Moreover, a formal reception is held at the Centre to which the Prime Minister of Malta and other honourable guests are invited. This annual event reinforces the excellent relations which the Centre, representing the Muslim community, has with the local authorities.

The Maltese islands with a total area of 316 km² make up a small republic in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. The capital city is Valletta. Their history has been described as chequered because all the powers that were ever present in the Mediterranean region have left their impact. Prior to independence in 1964, the Maltese islands have ended up as possessions or colonies of foreign powers including the Arabs in 870. The Maltese language is a direct result of this mixture of cultures. After 1090, European powers secured the Maltese islands into their realms and the islands eventually served as Europe's southern border and a bulwark of Christianity. Meanwhile new words from Italian and other European languages were assimilated into the Maltese language but the Semitic background prevailed.

The Maltese word Randan illustrates



this fact. It means Lent, the Christian time of fasting, and lasts forty days. Its first day is called Ras ir-Randan. A number of language scholars believe it to be an interesting relic of a time when Christianity and Islam co-existed on the island. The word Randan, the Christianised version of the Muslim Ramadan thus dates back to a time when the Christian period of fasting

was much more rigorous than it is today and comparable to the present Islamic Ramadan. This word is common to both Christianity and Islam (although rather altered after nearly 900 years) but for the Maltese it has no Islamic connotations or undertones. Similarly, common to both religions are the words Alla (Allah) and Ghid (pronounced 'eid, meaning festival.)



Geological Museum: Enlightening role in development

BY YEMEN TIMES STAFF

The importance of specialized scientific museums in enlightening the minds of different social classes and their contribution to embodying the meaning of culture in various sciences was recognized with the establishment of a geological museum in Yemen. As all people are aware, geology of the earth is a science dating back millions of years. Therefore the history of the geological museum is not similar to that of other museums that span for a short period of time in human civilization.

In 1999, the Ministry of Oil and Minerals initiated efforts to establish a geological museum. Despite the fact that the museum was not officially opened at that time, these efforts represent a great scientific and cultural achievement.

A museum can be defined as the place in which cultural heritage is kept for educational and cultural purposes. Nowadays museums are not merely places for keeping antiquities, instead they are centers for education, knowledge and culture in different areas.

When the Yemen Times reporter visited the museum, he found that it consists of two sections for receiving and displaying samples. These sections collect, study and document samples and ancient articles which are related to mineral activities. They receive different types mineral and stone samples from engineers and citizens and then arrange and display them and ensure they are safe. Schoolboys, university students, and people interested in geology can visit the museum to have a look at its contents.

The display section contains hand-made samples relevant to domestic services, olden mineral tools, samples of the industrial stones, metals and non-metals, agates and other articles.

There are four goals of the museum:

- 1) The historical goal: to learn the history of minerals and the remains of traditional articles used in handicrafts and then to document and display them.
- 2) The cultural goal: the museum generalizes and spreads the geological culture to the different social classes: specialists, experts, students and ordinary citizens.
- 3) The educational goal: the museum is an educational tool as its contents are connected with ancient samples of the scientific fields of geology and geography. The museum contains maps and photos through which students can obtain more information about minerals and stones.
- 4) The economic goal: the museum can promote the local services and make national investors acquainted with the local services



Tools used in ancient Yemen's mining industry. They are among the items exhibited at the Museum

aware of the requirements of the industry of minerals and stones in Yemen.

Contents of the museum:

The Geological Museum contains a number of exhibited articles. The first type of these exhibited articles can be described as historical, indicating that Yemenis have an exemplary history in the field of minerals and handicrafts. These handicrafts emerged in Yemen in different areas due to the differing availability of raw materials in those areas.

Historically, the Yemeni people realized the importance of minerals and their use in the decoration of house walls, and they exported them to other countries. The reality of minerals in Yemen emerges from the fact that Yemenis established their civilization through investing in minerals. The people of Sheba, for instance, were famous for the exploitation of gold to become very rich at that time. Because of the profusion of gold mines in their lands, doors of houses, temples, walls and roofs were variegated with gold, silver and agates.

The people of Sheba were skilled in polishing stones after extracting them from mountains. These stones were then used in the construction of dams, temples and houses.

In the section of historical articles one finds that contents can be classed into two groups, the first of which is related to the ancient articles. These include metal samples and stone ruins, in addition to articles that were used by mineral experts during old mining processes. These tools include masahiq (lotion stones) that were used in grinding crude gold. Additionally, there are some stone samples containing lead.

The second group consists of exhibited articles related to traditional Yemeni geological industry. These include the manufacturing of domestic crude materials such as red brick, pottery and alabaster. This in turn reflects the skills of ancient Yemenis and their enthusiasm to exploit the natural wealth of, and ability to adapt to, the geological environment.

The second section of the museum

contents contains samples of minerals and stones that were collected from different parts of the Republic. These minerals are identified, arranged and exhibited in a manner that facilitates recognition for all people. This group is divided into metals, non-metals, external minerals and stones and industrialized stones.

The third section of the museum contains construction stones and ornaments that were collected to be used as real wealth for the country. These stones are used extensively in the construction and decoration of buildings, adding beauty and taste to Yemen's distinctive architecture.

The people who work in the museum did not forget to exhibit the agates available in Yemen, which is renowned for its agates. In the olden times, the Yemeni man exploited resources such as these, profited from them domestically and exported them to other countries. This mineral wealth is lavishly promoted and their beauty amazes the beholder. This is reflected today as any visitor to Yemen dares not to leave without taking a ring, a bracelet or any other piece of gold.

The fourth section of the museum amazes the visitor for its varied articles that remain as a unique group because of their scarcity. These include stone samples of geographical fame like the basalt samples that were brought from the islands of Zugar and Hunaish. Other unique samples like the iron meteors that fell down in 1999 in the district of Yafe', are displayed as well as other educational and typical samples.

In addition to these displays, the museum contains exhibited articles of economic crude materials, such as glass, white cement and others. There are also displays of stone and fossil formation in Yemen that illustrate many geological periods.

The geological museum is an important institution in popularizing the mineral wealth of Yemen, but its limited facilities render it incomplete due to the lack of samples and the lack of a more spacious area. Presently, the museum is a hall of medium capacity that will benefit from being improved in days to come.

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Words of Wisdom



The Republic of Yemen cannot afford to develop on the basis of the traditional snail-pace growth rate. We need a strong force and zeal to address such grave issues as excessively high population growth rates, rapid depletion of water resources, corruption and mismanagement, etc.

Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf
(1951 - 1999)
Founder of Yemen Times

OUR
OPINIONReligious
tolerance

As Arabs and Muslims we find ourselves encapsulated in the endless cultural pressure in the form of a strict opinion opposing everything that is not on par with us, with cultural mottos indicating that whoever isn't our friend must be our enemy. Unfortunately this notion has put us as a culture in a disadvantage especially when we want to consider ourselves as an integral part of the global village. Arab and Muslim people are hurt, wronged and in turn feed conspiracy theories to the young minds it becomes easier for Muslims in general and Arabs in particular to explain our failure as a conspiracy against us; to blame others for all our problems.

In spite of being quite helpless, poor and suffering from corruption, dictatorship and poverty, Arab societies continue to feed this vicious cycle of conspiracy theory forgetting the true essence of Islam, the modest religion of peace that calls for religious tolerance and harmony among cultures and religions.

Fortunately, this is changing. Muslim youth of today are becoming more aware and more tolerant religiously. Recently I read an article of an Egyptian writer who said that 9/11 was good for the Muslim world because it was a wake up call for many people in this part of the world. Of course no one denies the magnitude of the tragedy and the loss of human life, but still, it seemed as she explained that this has become a chance for people, especially youth to find answers. This is equally accurate among non Muslim youth, who have started wondering "why do they hate us so much?" I believe that wondering is the first step to reaching the truth, because if you have stagnant thoughts and conceptions then it becomes very hard for you to see the other side of the story.

A new American friend of mind reminded by this fact as she was upset with an article dedicated to the conspiracy theory tightly knitted around Israel; Many Muslims blame Israel for most of the tragedies the Muslim world faces. Regardless if it is true that this new country has a hand in our political mess or not, does not matter, what matters is that if we want to become a better nation, then we should start with ourselves from within. If we are secure, strong and efficient then no one can manipulate our fate. I believe it is the excuse of the weak to blame others for their situation. My American friend made me think again about the preconceptions we have in our minds and she advised me to browse some websites on the Internet and try to get a gist of the other point of view.

Along my surfing I came across a web log that started with the phrase "I certainly hope you haven't come here with your mind already made up." And it was striking that it is actually a fact that most people, Muslims and non-Muslims, even as they attempt to listen, they are listening with their ears and not their hearts and minds. The web log continues with an interesting quote from Albert Einstein, which I feel compelled to convey to you today, it says: "The important thing is not to stop questioning; curiosity is its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."

Nadia Al-Sakkaf
Editor-in-Chief



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Islam and
respect of parents

DR. MANEA AL-HAZMI

Islam has great respect to parents during their lifetime and thereafter through giving them exceptional rights, Allah ordains believers in Qura'n to be kind to their parents. [And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age (while) with you, say not to them (so much as) "uff" and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up (when I was) small.] (Qura'n 17:23-24). Allah decreed good treatment towards parents during their lifetime, warned us against any dreadful treatment to them, and ordered us to make supplications for them during their life and after their death. Allah ordained us to be more kind to our parents during their old age because at this age they are weaker and they are in need of especial treatment.

Almighty Allah regarded kindness to parents just beneath worshipping Him due to its importance but he puts more emphasis on mothers in Qura'n. [And we have enjoined upon man (care) for his parents. His mother carried him, (increasing her) in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the (final) destination] (Qura'n 31:14). A man asked the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him: [who amongst his near ones had the greatest right over him. The Prophet replied: "your mother". He asked, "Then who is next? The Prophet replied: "your mother". He again asked, "Then who is next? The Prophet replied: "your mother". He asked, "Then who is next? The Prophet replied: "your father"] (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Kindness to the mother is the way to Paradise. Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said [Paradise is at the feet of mothers] (Narrated by Al-Nisai, Ibn Majah and

Ahmad). The mother has three times more rights upon her kids than that of the father for different reasons. First, she carries her baby in her womb for nine months, delivers him, and nurses him for two years. She has to pass these phases with critical suffering at the expense of her health and beauty. Second, she is weaker than the father.

Kindness to parents is the most loved deed by Allah after the prayer. This means that Allah gives a great reward for those who respect their parents. Abdullah bin Mas'ud (a companion of the Prophet) asked the Prophet [which of the deeds is best loved by Allah? The Prophet answered "The prayer at the proper time." I asked, "What is next?" The Prophet replied "Kindness to the parents".....]. (Narrated by Al-Bukari and Muslim). Parents are the gates of Paradise and mothers are keys of its gates. The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said [A parent is the gates of Paradise; so if you wish, keep to the gate, or lose it] (Narrated by At-Termidhi and Ibn Majah). Therefore, when you please your parents you please Allah and get the biggest reward (Paradise) in the hereafter.

The loser is the person who finds his parents or one of them at old age and does not enter Paradise: The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said [May he be disgraced! May he be disgraced! May he be disgraced, who finds his parents, one or both, approaching old age and does not enter Paradise] (Narrated by Muslim). Respect to parents not only a way to Paradise in the hereafter but also a way to success in this life. The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said [He who desires that he be granted more provision and his life be prolonged, should join ties with his blood relatives] (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

Allah has prohibited any word of contempt or bad treatment toward parents: [Whether one or both of them reach old age (while) with you, say not to them (so much as) "uff" and do not repel them but speak to them a noble

word] (Qura'n 17:23-24). In fact impiety or disobedience to a parent is one of the major sins that lead to Hell. The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said [Among the major sins are: Association of anybody with Allah (polytheism), disobedience to parents, killing a person, and taking a false oath (perjury)] (Narrated by Bukari). Also he said, [Allah forbids all of you to disobey your mothers] (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Therefore, the respect of parents is the second best deed after worshipping Allah and mistreatment of parents is the second major sin after polytheism.

Respect towards parents continues even after their death. A man asked the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him [Is there any thing, I can now do in benevolence towards my parents after their death? The Prophet peace be upon him answered: "Yes, by praying for them and soliciting (Allah's) mercy and forgiveness towards them, fulfilling their promises and undertakings, doing kindness to those who may be related to you through them, and respecting their friends.] (Narrated by Abu Daoud). Sons and daughters can perform good deeds such as supplication, pilgrimage, and charity for their parents after their death. Also the rights of parents upon their sons continue after the son's death. Parents get a share from the inheritance of their sons depending on whether their sons have children or not. The share is higher when their sons have no children as Qura'n states [And for one's parents, to each one of them is a sixth of his estate if he left children, but if had no children and the parents (alone) inherit from him, then for his mother is one third] (Qura'n 4:11).

The warm relations between Muslim parents and their sons and daughters are with deep respect and always amaze Westerners. People in the world celebrate the Mother Day once a year while Muslims consider all days of the year as parent's days. Praise be to Allah the Most Merciful and with His Mercy we respect our Parents.

Facing nature's fury

BY JEFFREY SACHS

The Pakistan earthquake continues a streak of shocking natural disasters during the past year: the Indian Ocean tsunami, killer droughts in Niger and other countries in Africa, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Central American mudslides, and Portugal's wildfires.

These events are unrelated, and humankind's vulnerability to natural hazards is as old as our species. Yet there are also commonalities – and warnings to us all: we are not prepared for these massive shocks, more of which are certain to come. Massive population growth has exposed vast numbers of people to new kinds of extreme vulnerability. There are now 6.5 billion people on the planet, almost four billion people more than fifty years ago. Current trends, according to the United Nations, will push the world's population up to around 9.1 billion by 2050.

As population rises, billions of people crowd into Earth's vulnerable areas – near coastlines battered by storms and rising sea levels, on mountainsides susceptible to landslides and earthquakes, or in water-stressed regions plagued by drought, famine, and disease. Typically, the poorest of the poor are pushed into the riskiest places to live and work – and also to die when natural catastrophes strike.

Many of the key hazards are increasing in frequency and intensity. Climate change is partly responsible. Both the number and strength of hurricanes are most likely increasing as a result of rising sea-surface temperatures caused by man-made global warming. Earth is set to warm further in the decades ahead, bringing more and bigger fires, mudslides, heat waves, droughts, and powerful hurricanes.

Similarly, we are also seeing the emergence and spread of new infectious diseases, such as AIDS, SARS, and avian flu. As human populations crowd new parts of the planet and come into

contact with new animal habitats, new infectious diseases spread from animals to humans. Such is the case with AIDS and avian flu. Other infectious diseases are likely to emerge, or to become more severe (as with dengue fever in Asia this year), as a result of changes in climate and interaction between human and animal habitats.

Another common element in all of these disasters is our shocking lack of preparedness, especially to help the poorest members of society. After Hurricane Katrina hit the United States, we discovered that President Bush had appointed a crony rather than a professional as head of America's emergency relief agency. Equipment and personnel needed to address the crisis were halfway around the world in Iraq.

Likewise, Pakistan was substantially ill equipped to deal with the recent earthquake, in part because, like the US, Pakistan over-spends on its military and under-spends on public health and emergency preparedness. International relief agencies are also starved for cash and resources.

Governments should be taking some basic steps. First, they should be making careful assessments of the specific kinds of risks their countries face, including risks from epidemics, climate change, extreme weather events, and earthquakes. Such assessments require establishing and maintaining a system of high-level and high-quality scientific advising. Bush, for example, would vastly improve US and global security if he started listening to top scientists and paid less attention to political lobbyists regarding the growing risks from man-made climate change.

There is a growing body of expertise to help get the job done. The Earth Institute at Columbia University, which I direct, recently completed a global assessment of several kinds of natural hazards, such as droughts, earthquakes, and floods, in partnership with the World Bank. Using advanced statistical and mapping methods, they identified how these various threats are arrayed around the world. Other colleagues at

the Earth Institute, and in similar research institutes, are making careful estimates of how these risks are evolving in view of changes in our planet's climate, population, and patterns of international travel and human settlement.

But political leaders are not using this kind of scientific information adequately, owing mainly to deep divides that persist between the scientific community, politicians, and the general public. The public is largely unaware of the scientific knowledge we have concerning the threats and risks that we face, and that we can reduce these risks by thinking ahead.

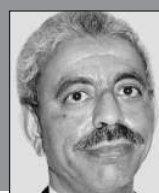
Politicians, in general, are experts at winning votes or building alliances, rather than at understanding the underlying global processes of climate, energy, disease, and food production that affect all of our planet's inhabitants. Even different groups of scientists – in public health, climate, seismology, and other specialties – do not communicate adequately with one another, despite the fact that today's threats often cut across different scientific disciplines.

These gaps between politicians and scientists, and among scientists themselves, must be closed if we are to overcome the risks that we face. Nature has reminded us all year of what is at stake.

The bad news is that the threats will almost surely intensify in the coming years, as our planet becomes even more crowded and subject to man-made change. The good news is that we have the science and the technology to address these risks better than we ever have. We can build a safer future, but only if we are prepared to use our scientific knowledge and expertise for the common good.

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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COMMON
SENSE

By Hassan Al-Haifi

For an Islamic
Relief Fund

If the Islamic Development Bank can be commended for its important role in helping Moslem countries face the challenges of development, then it should be also empowered with greater maneuverability and flexibility in confronting international disaster situations, especially within Moslem countries. While Moslem countries are not unique in facing natural disasters and calamities, the recent Tsunami catastrophe last year and now the severe earthquakes that hit Kashmir and the rest of Pakistan, seems to place many Moslem countries in disaster prone areas. In fact, the poor undeveloped nature of most Moslem countries makes them the more vulnerable to calamitous disasters, with high casualties and damages in the amounts that most of the countries involved can hardly sustain.

Needless to say, there is a lot of wealth and goodwill among the Moslem States of the world. But, with the increasing relentless chase that the American government is pursuing against all forms of organized Moslem philanthropic activity, in its so called "War against Terror", the governments of the Moslem states need to consider viable and meaningful alternatives to having their people become helpless victims of disasters reliant on the support of the international community to bail them out of their natural disasters.

Needless to say, the Moslem world is endowed with vast resources and there are many Moslem states that are exceedingly wealthy. Thus, it is not difficult to visualize that the Moslem World can establish an Islamic Relief Fund, that will be responsible for helping Moslem countries that are prone to disasters to cope with any catastrophic conditions that hit them from time to time. This IRF can probably commence under the auspices and guidance of the Islamic Development Bank, and thus can benefit from IDB's vast network of institutions and enterprises that can be found in most Moslem counties of the world.

The proposed Islamic Relief Fund should have annual donations from the member states of the IDB and should encourage Moslems everywhere in the world to contribute to its activities. Accordingly, the IRF would need to be managed on a greater dose of transparency and its activities regularly made known to the public, in order to stimulate greater contributions from the public.

The IRF should be encouraged to work with civil society in most of the concerned Moslem states, whether as donor states or victim states. This would mean in the initiation stage of the IRF as well, in order to insure that the proper mechanisms are set in to enhance this important partnership. This would also mean in the determination of the ways of devising the modus operandi of the IRF to make sure that is capable of meeting the needs of disaster victims, especially in Moslem countries, which are poor and deprived of the adequate infrastructure and mechanisms that will ensure that they are promptly relieved of the debacles they are in.

This observer could not help but express the pity and sorrow felt at becoming aware that there are at this moment 3 million brother and sister Moslems in Kashmir, who stand to face perishing in the mountains of Kashmir as the winter months set in and the snow starts to accumulate to 11 feet above the ground. These Kashmir are homeless victims of the latest earthquakes that hit Pakistan and the vulnerable Moslems of the Pakistani side of Kashmir. The winter is due to begin very soon there and unless some efforts are shown by all Moslem governments and their friends in the international community at large to find ways of providing them with adequate emergency shelters, then their fate will be the responsibility of all those who watched idly and not show any movement of heart.

That is why an IRF as proposed here would help relieve the Moslems in the future of having to dish out large amounts to aid their fellow Moslems in times of disaster as victims or contributing states and would provide a systematic Islamic effort at relieving the plight of fellow Moslems who have been fated to be unfortunate victims of unexpected calamities, wherever they may be, as well as be ready to assist our non-Moslem friends, who are faced with similar misfortune. As Moslems we are obligated to aid and support Moslems in need wherever they may be, and if we fail in finding the means of systemizing such aid and support then we have failed in a very implementing a very important obligation as dutiful faithful Moslems. An IRF would go along way in solving a chronic problem faced by many Moslem countries, who sit on disaster prone areas and the sooner it is established the better. May Allah enlighten us to the ways to come out of our misfortune, as well as our own misdeeds.

Dr. Dawood Al-Hidabi to the Yemen Times:

“In addition to possessing mental abilities people have to have commitment of heart and soul for them to succeed”

Dr. Dawood Abdulmalik Al-Hidabi rector of the Science and Technology University in Sana'a started his academic career in 1982 after attaining his PhD from the University of Stirling, UK in Teachers' Education. Since then he has been continuously leaving his fingerprints on the higher education sector in Yemen. Today Dr. Al-Hidabi is one of the prominent academics of the country and has been successful in establishing a distinguished institution: the Science and Technology University. Nadia al-Sakkaf, editor in Chief of the Yemen Times, met with Dr. Dawood Abdulmalik Al-Hidabi and filed this interesting interview.

Yemen Times: Could you give us a brief introduction about yourself?

Dr. D. A. Al-Hidabi: Firstly, I would like you thank you for inviting me to do this interview with the Yemen Times. To introduce myself academically I would like to start from my university graduation. After I finished my Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Education in Sana'a in Physics and Chemistry, and graduating top of my class in 1977, I got married and now I have 4 boys and 4 girls. I worked as a science inspector with the Ministry of Education then continued to higher studies in 1979 at University of Colchester in teaching physics. Then I moved to the University of Stirling where I finished my Masters Degree and PhD in Educational Research Methodology. I returned as a professor of education at Sana'a University for two years. I worked for one or two years as director of curricular education, then I did some teaching and administration as head of the Science Department and Postgraduate Department and ended up as deputy dean for Academic Affairs until 1993.

At that time I started working part time creating the first community college in Yemen at the national level. It was called the National College for Science and Technology, and we started with innovative programs like IT programming...etc. Then in 1994 we launched the Science and Technology University project, which embraced this college and more as we provided diplomas and degrees.

YT: Why start a private university, and what is special about the Science and Technology University?

DAH: When I was a deputy dean at Sana'a University, I suffered a lot from the red tape routine wasted much time to get little tiny things done. I was dissatisfied because of the decision-making process regarding improving teaching and learning and also the level of education itself. On the other hand, I got an invitation from those people who care for the education system in Yemen to establish an educational project. We started as a nursery and grade one school in 1992 through charity work, then we established the community college in 1993 and the University 1994. Now the school instructs all levels and five years ago



Dr. Dawood Abdulmalik Al-Hidabi

we started an English section at the school.

We started with a very small investment, which indicates that our experience is a success story supported by well-wishers who care for human resource development in the country. I believe donors should devote more money towards human resource development because Yemen needs highly-qualified people. Yemen needs tens of institutions. Currently we are just contributing to fulfilling the need; now our project has become a fully-fledged university with established operating mechanisms and well established rules that were developed throughout the years.

Not only do we have the general colleges at the University but we also have established the International College where the medium of education is in English and it includes specializations such as business, IT, Art & design. We also offer master degrees in MBA/MIT and postgraduate part-time degrees in coordination with the Malaysian Open University. On another front we have established on-campus accommodation for 600 male and female students and provided shuttle buses to and from the University.

What is special about the S&T University is that we started marketing, dental technicians, translation, and MIS courses and now we are offering high technical degrees in digital media, graphic design and interior architecture, all taught in English. In fact, even in the other general courses we emphasize Technology and English as every student should take 12 credit hours of English as well as an IT course in the basics of computers. We believe that we cater more effectively to the demand of the labour market than most of the other institutions. Another aspect of our university, which we pride ourselves on, is that we focus on small classes so that we ensure close and direct learning. Moreover, the IT technology used in the labs and in practical sessions aids in this as well. Last year with the help of a Malaysian firm, we installed an advanced bilingual (Arabic and English) LMS system for the students and teachers records and it is my contention that we are the first to do so in the region. The third thing that sets us apart is that we have team spirit and a decision-making process that is flexible and easy. For example, when I was working at Sana'a University I tried for two years to

install a phone line and still did not get it, but here at the S&T University such a process takes place in less a week. We have given authority to the deans, and every unit whether academic or administrative has its own strategic plan or action plan, which we follow through a monthly progress report.

YT: You have recently opened a training hospital for the students, could you tell us about this project and future plans for the university as a whole?

DAH: One of our recent expansions is the University's hospital, which we established six months earlier to offer quality health service. The health services in Yemen are of very poor quality and this is why we put in a lot of effort to establish our own hospital. The University's staff works in the hospital, and we also use it for medical student training. In addition to the hospital we have a lot of priority projects. We are enhancing our distance learning programs, improving the university automation system, developing the efficiency of teaching and learning, and developing human resources of staff and faculty members. We are also concerned with developing performance indicators and new tools for evaluating our progress as well as our own performance. On the other hand we are working on expanding the infrastructure of the University: in the coming five months we will have 50 new dental chairs to be placed at the dental hospital. We are now embarking on a joint venture with the British Council to establish an English school. The British Council has also funded a program for a postgraduate diploma in Management for women.



Science and Technology University

We are very ambitious; we are trying to progress quickly and aspire to leave an impressive benchmark in the Yemeni education system. We aim to learn more and develop the institutions better. To that end we provide continuous training for our staff and have increased the number of PhD degree holders. So far we sponsored more than 120 faculty members to attain their Masters or PhD degrees. We believe that our greatest investment should be in human resources. Moreover we have a strategy of providing our educational services to a wider geographical span and start new branches outside Sana'a. We already have branches in Ibb, Hudaidah, Taiz, Mukala, and Aden and we hope to expand even more.

YT: Do you have any partnership with international academic institutions?

We have expanded our academic and professional cooperation and established many partnerships with esteemed academic institutions around the



Collage of engineering

world. Our aim is becoming a well-known international university and this is a learning opportunity for us. So far we have learnt a lot from others' experiences. We have established partnerships with many Arab universities. We have a joint research program with Liverpool University and Leicester University where we train our staff in IT and Engineering. We also have cooperation with two state universities in the United States, and a number of Malaysian Universities. We are still developing our international reach and are planning exchange programs where international universities send their students, especially those interested in studying

Council, I established a Quality System Model for the University. Later I learned that we are one of the pioneers in the Arab world who have established such a system in an academic institution. Every year there is a special criterion that we announce for evaluating the performance of the staff. This year we explained that the criteria is personal development, and it is the staff themselves who do the evaluation.

The student portal information system helps in monitoring the progress of students and their academic performance. You can get the results of the students through the Internet, and guardians receive regular reports through the Internet every term through the Student Affairs and Services Department. In December this year I will present a paper to the Arab ministers of higher education about our model of quality assurance.

YT: Do you dedicate resources for student extracurricular activities? And do you encourage creation of student unions and associations? How do you ensure the university has a healthy non-political environment?

DAH: We have a department called the Students Affairs Directorate, which caters for social, sports, cultural and recreational activities. They supervise organizing tournaments with other universities out with our university, which we sponsor every year. We have similar activities at the girl's college, which has a gym for their sports and recreation activities. We have annual elections at the student unions for boys and girls. The students launch their own election campaigns and the supervising community is formed from the Student's Affairs Department who also allocate budgets for such events. As for politics, we emphasize that the University is a non-political environment and that we allow competition based on merit and what services the candidates could offer. If they want to be involved in politics, they can do that outside the university.

YT: How do you evaluate the higher education scene in Yemen? What are the challenges this sector faces and how do you recommend that they are solved?

DAH: I attended three workshops in Sana'a in the last three months and in one of them I presented a paper about private investors. There are many common problems shared between state and private academic institutions: one of the most prominent issues is the quality of education. The tragedy is that this issue wasn't even a topic for discussion at concerned authorities such as the Ministry of Higher Education until very recently. It was not until this year that the MHE

authority considered the accreditations of academic institutions. Only recently did the prime minister sign an act to evaluate the accreditation of private universities. This is a start, but there is clear discrimination because this act does not include state universities.

The issue of quality of education is not only limited to higher education, it also includes the school educational system. School graduates have a bigger problem because as they get closer to the working life, they are not armed in the least for the highly competitive life of today. The standard of education in schools is not very good and this is why we push our first year students very hard to try and make up for this deficiency. I guess this explains the high drop out rate in the first year fortunately this rate is much less in the second year.

YT: Some of the problems with university graduates is that they do not study according to market demand, what are you doing in this regard?

DAH: We know that the market demands specialized professions, professional English, IT and communication skills. Therefore we make sure that such subjects are compulsory for all students. First, we establish programs on the basis of the market demand in an attempt to equip them with skills to get good jobs. We don't know the general employability indicator of our graduates but we started last year with our computer science students and we found out that most of them get employed within 6 months of graduating. We have a database on the web of all our graduates, and I suppose we can try to track their career progress. And this year we will activate the graduate club alumni and create an electronic newsletter to trace the students' progress. In fact I realized that a lot of our graduates are employed in the Gulf countries, mainly in KSA and UAE. I travel extensively now and it really is a pleasure to meet graduates of our university working everywhere. So far we have graduated 9 classes of around 800-1000 students every year. Currently we have over 10 thousand students at the university. Some of those are enrolled in distance learning programs, of which 35% are females. This is a higher percentage than state universities whose percentages are 25% female in all disciplines, 20% foreigners, and almost the same percentage are non-resident Yemenis.

YT: What would you advise the college student of today?

DAH: From my own experience students should know more in order to make sound decisions; the more info one has about future professions the more capable one is of selecting the right program. One should think about what they would like to be in ten years, get more information, and ask people who know. Consultation, seeking advice and even surfing the Internet is a very helpful means of gathering information. The other thing is that one has to have motivation and commitment to learn. They must then make an effort to make their dreams come true. Dedication and patience are very important in fact. Today this is a science called emotional intelligence because in addition to possessing the mental abilities to succeed, people have to have commitment of heart and soul too. My father was a farmer and my family worked day and night to afford standard of living. We used to study at night by candlelight, during my intermediate and high school years and we even used to go out on the street in Taiz in order to study under streetlight. But here I am today.



Medicine collage

Use of Khat in Islam

DR. QAZI SHAIKH ABBAS BORHANY

People of Arabia, especially Yemeni people have become addicted of green leaf of Khat that was used by jungle people of Africa. This evil practice was established among Yemeni people for last few decades. It signs are largely visible in the nook and corners of Yemen. Addict class chewing Khat with great enthusiasm. It seems to look like an animal habit. Our religion Islam has provided us wealth of health and confers the perpetual benefits to its followers. In order to save Man from the poison of Shaitaan (evil), Allah bestowed the shield of Sharia (Islamic Law). The foundation of Sharia is upon the Fitrat (instinct.....). Shariat clarified what is Halal (permitted) and what is Haraam (forbidden). Every harmful explicitly declared Haraam that is in any way injurious, either physically or spiritually. How is it possible that there should be no clear injunction for a thing which is injurious to human health? Khat users for a justification of the use argue that there is no clear injunction of the Quran in this respect. This lame excuse is not only an admission of ignorance with the Quran, but also a declaration of revolt against this Comprehensive Code of Life. Quran says: each wet and dried thing is available in the Sunna. How is it possible that while science explains the side effects and harms of khat, Shariat do not guide in this regard. Ignorant with the instructions of Islam should know that the Creator has declared forbidden use of everything which is injurious for the health of human being. It is mentioned in Surat al Airaff, Ayat No. 157, "For them (people) pious things have been made Halal and impious things declared Haraam". Therefore according to Islam no impious thing can be forbidden till the Qiyamat. Khat has a foul smell, unpleasant taste, and is harmful to the body. This is sufficient to forbid it, because prophet Mohammed says: Who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right, forbid them the doing



of what is wrong, make lawful to them the good things of life, prohibit for them the evil things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were (previously) upon them. This Hadith draw the attention of those who try to find a lame justification for the use of khat. prophet Mohammed bestowed a principle on which we can examine each and everything. "Even small quantity of that thing is also forbidden which excessive produces intoxication" (Masnad Ahmad bin Hanbal). A Hadith says: "Every intoxicating thing is forbidden and if its excess use causes intoxication, its use even in a small quantity is forbidden", ("Durre Mukhtaar, vol. 5, Kitab ul Mashrabah, by Umm ul Mumeneen Umme Salma). Another Hadith says: "All those things are forbidden which intoxicate". According to the Hadith Literature, prophet Mohammed has clarified Khamar is forbidden. Khamar means not only Alcoholic

Drinks but every intoxicating thing is included in the definition of Khamar, which is forbidden. This clarification is an enough evidence for the class that wish to understand. khat is an intoxicant, if anybody has doubts whether khat is harmful or not, he may submit Khat for laboratory examination. People using khat are habituated to it and continue to make an increase in its doze day by day. Eventually the result is that without Khat their seances do not function properly and they can not do anything without it. Use of a cursed thing like khat is extravagance in the language of Quraan and also foolishness, and ignorance. User of Khat wastes his wealth and in return he gets nothing but harms and financial crises. He will be asked about his health and wealth and how he spent it, as it is cited in the Hadith. Wealth belongs to Allah, so one should be dare to waste it in disobedience to Him? Quraan says: And do not entrust to the impru-

dent ones the possessions that Allah has placed in your charge. And do not waste (your resources) extravagantly. Prophet Mohammed said: Allah hates three things: gossips, begging, and wasting money. It is essential, to prevent its users from entering mosque, because it's bad smell is even worst than of onion and garlic, users of those had been expelled from the mosque by the explicit instructions of prophet Mohammed who expelled those who had come to the mosque after eating onion and garlic, even when these things are allowed, because their bad smell was unbearable to the nearby. As per Hadith, "One who believes in Allah should not cause any discomfort to those around him". The instructions of Islam are based on the principle that "Do not cause discomfort to anybody nor allow anybody discomfort to you i.e. do not harm anybody nor let anybody harm you. Who can deny that Khat isn't harmful for health? Prophet Mohammed says: "Allah dislikes three things in His creatures the most:

(1) To talk on Religious issues undeservedly.
(2) Wastage of money and belongings.

(3) Questioning frequently without any aim or objective".

Using Qaat is really wastage of money and to argue for a justification of its use tantamount to irrelevant talk. In another verses of Quran, it has been stated that "eat and drink but do not be extravagant because Allah does not like the extravagant". It is a matter of great sorrow that women are involved in this bad habit. Prophet Mohammed says, "When you indulge in sins, conceal them". Openly using Khat is not a sign of cultured class but is an open act of sin, which destroy the health and wealth both. Instead of taking khat take fruits for family and yourself, that provides you better result. Following the practice of elite-class in evil acts is sin that provide you in return nothing but adversity

Khat users say that they have become so habituated to chewing it that they cannot live without it. While

in Ramazan, for long interval, habitual remain free from chewing khat, why cannot they live without it in other days? No body will die without chewing khat!

The principles of Islam are not confined to time or location, community or vicinity, but its benefits for all to come. The principles of Shariat cannot be changed neither be reform as Agent of Shaitaan demanded again and again. Quraan guide on this point and says: "You would never find any change in Sunnatullah (the commandments of Allah)". Qaat is such a cursed kills slowly and gifted cancer. Chewing Qaat is an attempt of suicide, so it is also a burning fire of Jahannam. Quraan says: "Do not destroy yourselves by your own hands", (Surat al Baqarah). Another Ayat says: "Do not kill yourselves!" (Surat al Nisa).

Evils of the use of khat according to the chemical research by the World Health Organization (WHO) has established that there are two substances in the young leaves which are responsible for the stimulating effect: cathin and cathinon. Both substances are very closely related chemically to the amphetamines, and have almost identical effects. Just like amphetamines, cathin and cathinon are both responsible for the release of adrenaline. Consequently, body temperature and blood pressure rise, the pulse rate increases and the emotional state of the person becomes excited. The after-effects of taking khat, which could be described as a sort of "hangover", are loss of appetite and sleep, nervousness and even depression. The intensity of the "hangover", however, depends on the type of khat used. The very expensive kinds are supposed to have no after-effects, while the cheaper and probably poorer sorts produce ill effects. Because of its effects, I (as many others) consider khat to be one of the drugs that give false joy for a limited time. It is also known to be addictive. Those who try it more than once can't give it up easily. This repugnant habit swallows up to 30 percent of the monthly income, a great percentage, when you know that

the average monthly income is much less than 100 US \$. In some families, the purchase of khat is carried out at the expense of buying food and other necessities. Moreover, khat has its effects on family ties. Parents who chew khat regularly or daily spend most of their free time in khat parties. What remains of it doesn't satisfy the need of their children for quality family time. Most of the kids who get raised by khat addicts feel the neglect that children of drug and alcohol addicts experience. They might not suffer from the physical abuse the latter go through since khat has the opposite effect on the human brain than that of narcotics and spirits. However, the absence of a father or a mother figure affect the next generation mentally and emotionally. The same thing could be applied to married couples. When a spouse spend more time with his or her khat friends than in the couple's home, then the marital relationship would deteriorate with the days. How can a healthy family be nurtured under such circumstances? The answer is simple: it can not. Not only does khat affect the peace of the homes of individual Yemenis, but it has also affected the national income and family life. Yemen was famous for its coffee plantations. However, many farmers have replaced coffee with khat plantations to support their habit, and to gain profit since khat is much expensive than coffee. However, khat is banned in most of the countries of the world, and Yemen as a country has suffered a decrease in the national income due to the loss and decrease in coffee export. Hopefully one day soon, we will Inshallah see a khat Free Yemen, (khat, chemical research by the World Health Organization, U.S.A.).

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Al-BEIDA'A: A rock from depth of history



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Situated southeast to Sana'a and 268 km away, the governorate of al-Beida'a is placed 2250 meters above sea level. The name Al-Beida'a came from an ancient castle had the same name and dates back to an earlier age. The origin of the name derives from the fact that a large rock of white color was found in the city that only contained rocks that were black in color. A castle was built on that rock and named Al-Beida'a.

The architectural style prevalent in Al-Beida'a is stone construction of the ground floor with mud-built upper floors. Its old houses are distinguished with a particular architectural pattern similar to that of the Saadah province. Some houses are fully built with stones in the unique style of Al-Beida'a and the surrounding areas of Hareeb and Al-Jooba of the Marib region.

As in many Yemeni areas, Al-Beida'a has a great history in building mosques. And it is mentioned in some historical texts that the first mosque was built in Al-Beida'a province, and dates back to the middle of the first century of the Hegira.

Al-Kaddi Mosque is the second most ancient mosque known in the Al-Beida'a area, a fact that is written in the roof of the mosque itself. The engraved writings there reveal that the mosque dates back to the 17th decade of the first century A.H.

Al-Beida'a is very famous for its wide variety of historical sites. The regions affiliated administratively to Al-Beida'a are known locally for their skills in the breeding of camels, and the industrial tailoring of traditional costumes.

Al-Beida'a is also known for the unique AL-Beida'ani dance, with its quick paced moves and fast rhythm.

Al Beida'a City is the administrative center of the province, located in the southeast part of the province near Mukayras. It is connected to Dhamar by a paved road across Rada'a and to Abyan via Mukayras.

The important sites of Al-Beida'a

Al-Beida'a has many interesting natural sites and baths such as Al-Seelah Bath located in the Al-Tafah zone. This bath, for example, has special seasons of the year.

Besides the green and mountainous lands or mineral steam baths, the province of Al-Beida'a has various desert areas that are very suitable for desert tourism, especially nearer to Shabwh Governorate.

• Rada'a:

55 km from Dhamar, Rada'a is an ancient historic site. It is said that the Hymiarate king, Shammar Yahri'ash, took this city as his residence. It was also an important center of the Tahiriyyah dynasty in the 15th century A.D.

The houses here are built with white clay distinguishing them as unique to Rada'a. The windows are double and sometimes triple arched, and covered by board marble slabs. This style of architecture is unique to Rada'a.

• Rada'a Fort:

Located at the top of a hill, which enhances its fortification, the fort includes some parts of the stones of the city wall which is still standing.

• Al-Aameriyah Mosque:

The most interesting sites are Al-Aameriyah Mosque and School, which is a wonderful mosque, peerless in architectural design, decoration, and domes.

Al-Aameriyah Mosque has a unique Islamic architecture not just on the level of Yemen but also on the level of the entire Islamic world.

It was built by Sultan Aamer Abdul-Wahhab around 500 years ago, and consists of two levels, the first level being for prayer, while the second level is for schooling.

• Mukayras

This is a small mountain city with a moderate climate that differs from the climates that prevail in the rest of Abyan. This is due to the fact that the city lies 2000 m above sea level.

• Shamarr Market:

A famous ancient market, which was once one of the prominent Arabic markets, Shamarr is still held on Thursdays as has been for many years. This market was a very important center that connected the north of the Arab peninsula with its south.

The Mountains in Al-Beida'a Governorate:

- Barsh Mountain, Saba Mountain, and Al-Hubaihiyyah Mountain are all located to the south of Rada'a.
- Qaifa Mountains.
- Mukayyaras Mountain.



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