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**The Policy Foresight Programme &
The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies**

Synopsis of the seminar on

The Impacts of Climate Change on the Islamic World

24 July 2006

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies



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The Impacts of Climate Change on the
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A seminar on **The Impacts of Climate Change on the Islamic World** took place in the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS) on 24 July 2006, and was hosted jointly by OCIS and the Policy Foresight Programme of the James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization. The Chairman was Sir Crispin Tickell, and the seminar was introduced by Dr Farhan Nizami. The principal speakers were Mr Fazlun Khalid on *An Islamic Response to Climate Change*, Dr Lutfi Radwan on *Applying a Muslim Perspective in Practical Implementation*, and Professor Francis Robinson on *What the Major Impacts on Climate Change are Likely to be for the Majority of Muslim Societies*. A list of participants is attached. A note of the proceedings was taken by Susan Lee (Secretary to the Policy Foresight Programme).



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Report of Proceedings

Dr Nizami welcomed those attending the meeting. It was the third seminar in a series of exploratory meetings about Islamic perspectives on the environment. He believed that the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies should encourage discussion about the scientific and social implications of environmental change and sustainable development.

Sir Crispin Tickell said that issues of climate change were high on the global agenda. They had direct relevance to Islam. The science was advancing rapidly, and next year would see the Fourth Assessment on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He had recently been to the Hadley Centre of the Met Office and had seen some of their future scenarios. Some looked ahead 20 years, but others up to 200. In understanding climate change we should recall the drastic effects of such change in the past, in particular over the last 10,000 years. Civilizations had come and gone, partly as a result of such changes, but following the industrial revolution we now faced some of the most drastic changes of all. It should go without saying that changes in temperature, rainfall and drought, sea level rise, and extreme events would all greatly affect Islamic countries whether in the Middle or Far East.

He said that the Green College Centre, which, with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, had been the host for the first two previous meetings, had now been transformed into the Policy Foresight Programme of the James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization. Mr James Martin took a keen interest in climate problems, and would be setting out his views about the future in a book to be published in September.

Fazlun Khalid spoke of the long history of life on earth and the tiny proportion of it filled by humans. Since the industrial revolution in the West, human activities had been upsetting the natural balance, and were doing immense damage to the surface of the earth in the name of progress. Indeed current human activities could be seen as suicidal. Humanity was on a train whose front was going over a precipice while more humans were still jumping on at the back. The ideals of the consumer society were self defeating. Instead of claiming to dominate nature, and believing, following Descartes, that humans were lords and masters of creation, humans should be maintaining a balance with nature

and understanding their part in it. This was fully recognized in Islamic teaching. He went through the four principles to govern the human condition: Tawheed, Fitra, Mizan, Khalifa. Humans had a special place within God's creation, and had responsibilities as stewards or guardians of the earth.

He then spoke briefly about financial inter-mediation, and the artificiality of money as a medium of exchange within the Western system of economics. Investment needed to be socially responsible so that investors knew how their money was being used. We needed to rethink the whole human relationship with nature and its resources, and above all to take account of the spiritual dimension as enshrined in Islam.

In discussion the following points were made:

- The problems were global, and we needed global solutions to them. Some elements were already in place. There was the Montreal Protocol on ozone, and the Framework Agreement on Climate Change, with the Kyoto Protocol. But we need a universally applicable code of ethics. So far we had the Earth Charter which provided an intellectual foundation.
- The present balance of power was changing fast with the rise of China and India. Competition made things worse rather than better.
- At present, 20% of the earth's population enjoyed 80% of its resources. The poor naturally wanted to enjoy what they saw as the visible advantages of the rich even if their expectations were unrealistic. Poverty was a problem in itself. People in poor countries often thought that current environmental problems belonged to Western society, and that to try and persuade them to go in a different direction was a sort of Western plot to keep them down. Unfortunately most things, including educational systems and excessive faith in technology pointed them in the wrong direction.
- In the last few years there had been more thought about the issues, not only in general but also in financial terms: hence the movement towards socially responsible investment; but the results were so far patchy, and scarcely figured in universities (Teheran being a notable exception).
- The importance of technology was exaggerated. It was after all man-made, and should be seen as a tool rather than anything else.

- Previously there had been a broad balance between people and their environment. This had been the basis of human society over millennia. It was now being upset with industrialization, ever increasing demand for water and the growth of urban populations. People in cities often lost all connection with and understanding of nature. They were also scarcely aware of the origin of products, including food, on which they depended.
- Different countries had different cultures and traditions, and Muslim countries were no exception. Their history and circumstances made it hard for them to contribute to the solution of problems apparently created in the West. For example Muslim countries East of the Hindu Kush faced very different problems from those in the Middle East.
- Until Muslim societies got over the problem of blaming the West for the many injustices they believed had been committed against them, there could be little progress.
- Perverse systems of taxation and subsidies failed to recognize environmental problems, in particular over water and fossil fuel resources.
- Pressure on governments in the West to tackle environmental problems often came from non-governmental organizations. This had been particularly useful in Eastern Europe. It was not clear whether similar networks existed in the Islamic world.
- Current economics was partial and misleading. We had to get away from conventional thinking about such concepts as economic growth, use of GNP/GDP and consumer type development. At present many Muslim countries were bent on big cars, construction of sky scrapers and consumption of irreplaceable resources such as fossil water. The current deforestation of Borneo and the creation of the Asian dust cloud were examples of what not to do. Nonetheless it was encouraging that an Islamic bank was the largest investor in one of the world's biggest wind power projects.

Dr Lutfi Radwan approached the subject from within the framework of Islamic cosmology. This recognised the essential unity in all creation, but gave particular responsibilities to humans as guardians or stewards. They had to maintain a balance within the natural order, respect it, and take account of the spiritual dimension governing their interactions with it.

They were encouraged to develop their societies with regard to revealed guidance and their own moral conscience or fitra (natural state). Islam was a religion of community and it was a collective responsibility to ensure that governments did not follow policies of selfishness, greed and resource depletion, or distort the law in purely national interests. A fundamental truth of Islam was that "God will not change the state of any community until they first change that which is within themselves". In the current environmental crisis this called for a greater emphasis on bottom-up and community led initiatives - individual responsibility as opposed to blaming institutions.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Pressure to manage environmental problems had to come from top down as well as from bottom up. Those with selfish corporate interests often came in between. In his book *Collapse*, Jarred Diamond had distinguished three stages of human behaviour: first recognition of a problem; secondly ideas about how to resolve it; and thirdly action on it. At present we were somewhere between stages one and two.
- Better education and the psychology that went with it had a vital part to play. Only some Islamic countries, notably Indonesia and Iran, had so far brought environmental considerations into University teaching and research. Too often the educated elites in Islamic countries failed to take proper account of the teaching in the Qu'ran, and took on inappropriate Western modes and thinking and conduct, for example in exploitation of fossil fuel reserves. There was a lot to be done in Islamic countries to ensure that problems were identified and interpreted in Muslim rather than Western terms.
- The problems of the environment should always be seen in the context of other problems: for example population increase and spreading urbanization. In this regard some Islamic countries were better than others (for example Bangladesh and Iran on population and family planning). There was nothing in the Qu'ran which outlawed family planning.
- Throughout the Islamic world there were failures to protect and make proper use of water supplies. There was flexibility in Islamic thinking and interpretation of doctrine on the use of water, which took account of the need to value, and if need be, to recycle water.

Professor Francis Robinson said that the Islamic world was particularly vulnerable to climate change. He drew attention to six main factors. First came the effects of rising sea levels, with their effects on coastal communities (one Muslim state - the Maldives - might be totally eliminated and Bangladesh could lose two thirds of its territory). As a result there would be destruction of livelihoods, loss of life in violent weather events, and large movements of people in search of somewhere to live. Secondly, there were the effects of the warming of the oceans. These included destruction of coral reefs and significant changes in fish populations. Hurricanes and cyclones would become more intense and severe. Thirdly, patterns of drought and rainfall would change, with enormous consequences for human populations. Fourthly, water supplies would be diminished from the melting of Himalayan and other glaciers. The supply of water might first increase but then diminish severely. Fifthly, there would be new patterns of disease with the proliferation of old and new micro-organisms. Lastly, change, which many in the past believed to be slow, might in fact be relatively fast. We were now trying to identify the tipping points of change. Many Muslims believed environmental problems were the result of Western economic activity and that they were therefore the victims of grave injustice. Creation had been given to humankind in trust. Hence environmental abuse could be seen as yet another reason to struggle against global capitalism and all its works.

In discussion the following points were made.

- At the present rate of increase in the volume of atmospheric greenhouse gases, change could indeed be very rapid. We should be as concerned about how to adapt to the consequences as about how to mitigate them. Humans were now set on a suicidal course.
- One way of looking at the ethical issues involved, was the philosophy of Contraction and Convergence (as expounded by Aubrey Meyer). We faced a moral as well as a scientific problem and the long term future required a reduction in current inequities.
- The consumer model of society, as understood in the West, was unsustainable, and unless corrected would lead to social and economic collapse. New applications of technology might solve some problems but create others.
- We had to look again at the use of fiscal instruments as a means of giving incentives for different behaviour, and imposing penalties on those who did not conform. Life

styles in the West had to change if anything like a more equitable world was to be created. There was a moral imperative behind the need for change.

- It might be necessary to give people a fright before they saw sense. According to the doctrine of benign catastrophes, we needed things to go visibly and accountably wrong to create the right mood for change. We had to hope that they would be more benign than catastrophic. A good example was hurricane Katrina, but it had to be correctly interpreted. One way of looking at this issue was to see it in terms of security. This would help move it up national as well as global agendas.

Sir Crispin Tickell said that we needed a new institutional framework for dealing with global environmental problems. He had long favoured the idea of a World Environment Organization to balance and be the partner of the World Trade Organization. This might be the opportunity for a major Islamic initiative, in which the main Muslim countries could take a valuable lead. It would also bring the Islamic and Western worlds together in a common cause.

The day's events warrant reflection on the impacts of climate change on the Islamic world. It was a chance for practitioners and academics from a variety of backgrounds to address an issue that will have long term ramifications from a perspective different from most assessments of climate change. The Policy Foresight Programme and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies look forward to possible future collaboration on other topics.



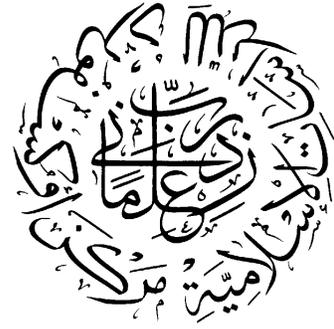
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Participants

1	Dr. Mohammad Akram	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
2	Dr. Iqbal Asari	
3	Prof. Peter Beaumont	Department of Geography, University of Wales
4	Michael Carmichael	
5	Muzammal Hussain	Masters Student, University of Sussex
6	*Fazlun Khalid	Director, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences
7	Susan Lee	Secretary, Policy Foresight Programme
8	M.A. Muqtedar Khan	Islam & Global Affairs, University of Delaware
9	Dr. Basil Mustafa	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
10	Prof. Norman Myers	Green College, Oxford University, and Adjunct Professor, Duke University
11	Dr. Farhan Nizami	Director, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
12	Derek Osborn	Chairman of Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future
13	Dr. Ali Paya	Visiting Professor, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster
14	*Dr. Lutfi Radwan	School of Geography, University of Oxford
15	Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf	Chairman, Cordoba Initiative NY
16	*Prof. Francis Robinson	Royal Holloway College and Bedford New College
17	Sir Crispin Tickell	Director, Policy Foresight Programme
18	Dr. Angela Wilkinson	James Martin Institute, University of Oxford

* denotes speakers

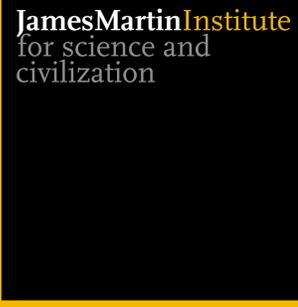


Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies was established in 1985 to encourage the scholarly study of Islam and the Islamic world. The Centre provides a meeting point for the Western and Islamic worlds of learning. At Oxford it contributes to the multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary study of the Islamic world. Beyond Oxford, its role is strengthened by a developing international network of academic contacts. The central aim of the Centre is to open doors to the Islamic world, helping to understand the people and societies where Islam is practised, and through understanding, to achieve tolerance and friendship. The founding Director of the Centre is Dr Farhan Ahmad Nizami, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. The Centre is assisted by an Academic Advisory Committee consisting of senior members of the University.

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Policy Foresight Programme

The Policy Foresight Programme, part of the James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization at the University of Oxford, is designed to facilitate interaction between government, business, industry, the media, and academia on issues of science, technology, and the environment. The purpose is to identify leverage points in current policy that could have significant long-term benefits for civilization. Under the direction of Sir Crispin Tickell, the main activity of the Programme is to host up to six 1-day seminars, where around 25 people will engage in constructive debate to further integrative thinking on a particular issue. The emphasis of the seminars is to look anywhere from 10 to 50 years into the future to see what will be the major decisions we will be faced with then and what can be done now to direct policy along a resilient path. The Programme will cover all major areas of the James Martin Institute, namely: Tomorrow's People, Tomorrow's Technologies, Tomorrow's Planet, Governance of Technological Change, Technology and Inequality, and Tomorrow's Civilization.