

## Document

**The 1998 International Academic Conference on Islamic Jerusalem  
"The Centrality of Jerusalem in Islam"  
Organised by the Islamic Research Academy (IRAP)  
at S.O.A.S., University of London  
on 22 August 1998**

## INTRODUCTION

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie**

*Honorary President of Islamic Research Academy*

As Honorary President of the Islamic Research Academy, I am very happy to be with you today, and to give this Introduction to the Conference on behalf of the Academy.

The Islamic Research Academy was founded four years ago to establish a new discipline within Academia about Jerusalem. Our focus is on that side of Jerusalem so often ignored, her association with Islam, her Islamic heritage, character and civilisation.

In these last four years, we have managed to establish a new frame of reference concerning Jerusalem through our various activities such as the Academic Journal "Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies", the Jerusalem Prize for Young Muslim Scholars, Exhibitions, Scholarships, Lectures, Publication of Books, Posters and Newsletters, as well as this Annual Conference. I think I can safely say that the Academy is by now a truly unique International platform for the discussion of studies and issues related to Islamic Jerusalem.

Last year's Conference was a great success, and we received very encouraging comments from all those who attended, and it was well reported around the world. The success

of last year gave us the encouragement to continue with our work of promoting dialogue and opening debates that will shed light on new avenues of understanding. The uniqueness of this event is that it brings to the West scholars from all over the world to discuss those issues relating to Islamic Jerusalem in both English and Arabic, in an Academic rather than a political framework.

After the broad approach of last year's Inaugural Conference, the Academy has decided to move in a more focused direction in this and future years. The theme this year, as all of you are aware, is "The Centrality of Jerusalem in Islam", of which people tend to know very little, especially here in the non-Muslim world. We are happy that we have managed to bring so many distinguished speakers from Jordan, Morocco, Jerusalem, and the UK. Even our audience this morning has come from around the world - America, Europe and the Middle East.

We are very grateful to you all, speakers and delegates, for making such efforts to be here with us today. We are also very honoured that His Majesty the King Hassan II of Morocco, the Chair of the Jerusalem Committee established by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), has sent Professor Abbas Jirari as his representative to address the Conference.

I am sure that all of you are aware that what happens in Jerusalem not only affects the Middle East, but the whole world. If we are to find a solution to the current situation, it is essential that we have knowledge of the significance and importance of Jerusalem to all the conflicting parties. Ignorance inevitably leads to fear and prejudice, misinterpretation of events and motives, false judgements and misconceived plans, with every mistake leading to more conflict.

Ignorance leads to injustice, and as Karen Armstrong said at last year's Conference: "From the very earliest days, it seems the cult of Jerusalem was inextricably bound up with the quest for social justice. Thus in the Hebrew Bible, prophets and psalmists repeatedly reminded their people that Jerusalem could

not be a holy city of Shalom (of Peace) unless it was also a city of Tseddeq, of Justice."

What the Academy is trying to provide is the knowledge necessary to achieve justice and peace in the region. The principle of justice is one that is above any single political affiliation, which is why the Academy is not politically aligned, has membership open to all, and any works we publish are essentially judged by Academic criteria.

Finally, I must add that we are very thankful to Al-Tajir World of Islam Trust for financial assistance towards some of the expenses of the Conference. I hope you enjoy your day, and like you I am looking forward to listening to the presentations from our distinguished guests. So I will waste no more time and get the proceeding under way by introducing our first guest today to give her Opening Address.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey MP is the Chair of the All Party Britain-Palestine Group, and Vice Chair of the Labour Middle East Council. She has just recently returned from leading a group of Labour MP's visiting the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.