

## Document

The 1999 International Academic Conference on Islamic Jerusalem  
"Muslim-Christian Relations in Jerusalem"  
Organised by the Islamic Research Academy  
at S.O.A.S., University of London  
on 7 September 1999

### INTRODUCTION

**Sir Cyril D. Townsend**

*Honorary President of Islamic Research Academy*

As Honorary President of the Academy I am very pleased to be with you today to give this introduction to the Conference on behalf of the Academy. I did, of course participate last year, but this is the first time I have had the pleasure of extending this opening welcome from the Academy to all the Conference speakers, delegates and guests. As some of you may be new to the work of the Academy, however, and the rest will probably be wondering what we have been doing over the last year, I will begin with a brief summary of the results of our recent efforts.

In the last year we have gone from strength to strength in establishing the "new frame of reference" concerning Jerusalem which we announced at the First Conference in 1997. That has always been a central aim of the Academy, involving establishing a new discipline within Academia, and encouraging young scholars to specialise in the field.

To this end we received an invitation from His highness Shaikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum to visit Dubai earlier this year, to announce the "Shaikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Jerusalem Studies Scholarship for Young Researchers".

The delegation from the Academy led by Lord Watson, visited Dubai to receive the scholarships, and the first set of students is now in this country preparing for their post-graduate studies which will start in October. I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Highness once again for his generosity in sponsoring his Scholarship, one of the most important projects in the Academy.

During the visit to Dubai, the delegation from the Academy met with many senior people, and good contact has been established with the two main Universities in the Emirates, the United Arab Emirates University in Al-Ain, and Zayed University in Dubai, with whom we hope to develop a long and constructive relationship.

This Scholarship is another serious effort on the part of the Academy to prepare young scholars as specialists in Islamic Jerusalem. There are many scholars studying Jewish and Christian Jerusalem, but until now there have been very few specialists in the subject of Islamic Jerusalem. To that end, we are now involved in the process of trying to establish an academic link with one of the British Universities, and provide a home in this country for Islamic Jerusalem Studies.

In addition, to encourage young scholars to research Islamic Jerusalem, the management committee decided to widen and change the criteria for the Jerusalem Prize, and instead of offering one prize each year we will be offering ten smaller prizes, five to the British Universities and another five for students from the rest of the world.

More good news since last year, is that Dr. Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi has received approval from the Faculty of Arts at Stirling University to teach an undergraduate unit entitled "Islamic Jerusalem", which will be a unique undergraduate unit within British Universities, and which will hopefully bridge a gap in the field.

Also last year, we continued to publish the Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies, the latest issue of which is now available, hot off the press along with another publication fresh from the printers. For I am very pleased to announce that we have just published an important historical document concerning Jerusalem, the Report of the International commission appointed by the British Government in 1930 and approved by the Council of the League of Nations in 1931, determining 'the rights and claims of Moslems and Jews in connection with the Western or Wailing Wall at Jerusalem'.

We at the Academy trust that this new publication setting out the Commission's deliberations and conclusions will help those looking to understand the position of the Western Wall and Jerusalem in International Law. You can, of course, check out all our publications, old and new, in the foyer.

Another key activity in the Academy's attempt to establish a "new frame of reference" is this Annual Academic Conference on Islamic Jerusalem. Last year's Conference was a great success. We received many encouraging comments from those who attended, and the proceedings were well reported around the world. Last year's theme was " The Centrality of Jerusalem in Islam", and this year we felt it appropriate, in the light of the end of the Millennium (as well as the 900th anniversary of the

Crusades", to focus today's conference on the theme of Muslim-Christian relations in Jerusalem.

We are extremely happy that we have managed to bring together so many distinguished speakers from Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem and the UK. Ever our audience this morning has come from around the world, America, Europe, Malaysia and the Middle East. We are most grateful to you all, speakers and delegates, for making such efforts to participate in the conference.

Finally I must add that we are very thankful to Al-Tajr World of Islam Trust for this their third year of financial assistance towards some of the expenses of the Conference. I would like also to express our thanks to Al-Muntada al Islami, who also for the third year running have supported us by providing accommodation and office facilities while the organising committee are staying in London.

I hope you enjoy the day, but like you I am eagerly looking forward to listening to the presentations from our distinguished guests. So I will waste no more time and get the proceedings under way by introducing our first guest today, Tony Lloyd, Member of Parliament for Manchester Central, and Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from 1997 to 1999, and ask him to present the opening Address.