

TABLEEGH IN BOSNIA

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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,

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Introduction



In 1992 the World Federation of KSIMC under the leadership of marhum Mulla Asghar Ali MM Jaffer embarked upon propagation of the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri faith among the Bosnian community. For this reason the Bosnia Desk was set up within the Islamic Education Board. The Desk moved to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2005. It was registered officially under the name "Zivot" Foundation (Life Foundation). (Please, read more about the tableegh opportunities and challenges in Bosnia in the Appendix no.1)

Vision and Mission

The vision is to have an independent, confident and religiously committed Bosnian Muslim Shi'a Ithna Asheri community which is respected and recognized in the society for its commitment and contributions to the common good.

The mission is to promote the way of life, moral values and spiritual teachings of the Ahlulbait a.s., especially among the youth. This is being done through the activities listed in the Appendix no.2

Current and planned activities



The Centre "Kuća bosanska" is the hub of our activities. It houses an office, a main hall, a library and a kitchen. The daily prayers have been already established. On Thursday evenings we have regular programmes with namaz, Dua Kumayl, a lecture and niyaz. The programmes are also held to commemorate some of the important Islamic dates as well as in the months of Ramadhan and Muharram. Classes for children are being held on the weekends.

The time had come to focus more on the Bosnian Shi'a youth. We are preparing the next generation by teaching them the religious knowledge as well as helping them to gain certain skills useful for their social and economic life. For that purpose we are making our Centre more attractive to them. The idea is that, beside the religious education, we offer them courses in practical skills in different traditional crafts, like sewing, pottery, weaving, knitting, leather and woodwork, modeling, bookbinding etc..



Self-sufficiency

The proposed model for self-sufficiency is that we primarily invest more time, energy and resources in activities and projects that would educate and train the next generation Bosnian Shias. They will in turn form a religiously committed, educated and skilled community that will stand behind an organization like ours and support it by their financial contributions, like khums, zakat, donations, etc., just like the Khoja establish and support their own organizations.

In the second place come other projects that help us, as an organization, to diversify sources of funding with the activities that are consistent with our mission and goals.

Soon we will have two flats to rent or use one or both as guest houses. The interest to visit Bosnia that was observed among the Khoja community in London was promising. If we nurture it further by offering regular short Bosnia tours, especially for the younger generation, it could bring an additional income as well as bringing the communities together.

The other possible project was the promotion of land cultivation and food production. Imam Ali (as) has said: "The one who finds water and [fertile] soil, and remains needy, indeed, such person has been removed from God's mercy"¹ The United Nations Development Programme website writes "Bosnia and Herzegovina has a great potential in agriculture and food processing sector given its numerous favorable conditions such as: over 1.5 million hectares of agricultural land; excellent climate and fertile soil, as well as high quality water; most soils do not contain chemical fertilizers and there is no practice of using pesticides; vicinity of the world's largest markets. It has ideal prerequisites for organic livestock farming, and organic food production in general."² Brother Yusuf Yusufali of Comfort Aid International was ready to invest 100 000 euros in land and give it for use for 5 years. We are still searching for the suitable plot. A Shia farmer expressed his interest to establish and run a farm. We are looking for a near, a short driving distance place in order that the family is near the Centre.

Regarding further development of the existing plot, we have submitted an application to the planning and building regulations office to construct two more buildings. One is a shop with three flats on the first floor and a fruit and vegetable processing hall. We are still waiting for the outcome of our application. Most probably we will get the permissions, but it is better to wait for the official confirmation before making any further plans.

APPENDIX NO 1: Opportunities s and challenges:

1.1. Positive attitude towards Shiism

The Bosnian Islamic Community (BIC) in general has a positive attitude towards Shia Muslims. Exceptions are those who have been influenced by Wahhabi teachings. Also the Bosnian Muslims were for centuries living side by side with other religious groups, therefore "different" Muslims are likely to be well received among the ordinary people. The decades of the communism have detached the Bosnian Muslims from their religion and diluted their religious zeal, but at the same time it has preserved them from inter-Muslims disputes and hostilities, leaving them open minded and unprejudiced, and thus receptive to other Islamic traditions.

1.2. European integration

After the 1992-5 war the political establishment and institutions are slowly adopting features of the Western democracies. The country is de facto ruled by the EU Special Representative (High Representative) whose job is to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a "peaceful, viable state on course to European integration". Different new laws are now in place to protect the minority groups and the country's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition.

¹ Mizanul Hikmah, volume 4, p. 1533, hadith no 7548

²² Fruit and Vegetable Industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp.ba/upload/publications>

1.3. Global political situation

In the current world situation, Bosnian Muslims are being closely watched by their Christian neighbours as well as the Europeans and the Americans. Some of them are looking at Bosnia as a "Muslim presence" in the area and a "potential breeding ground for Muslim fundamentalism in Europe". For that reason Bosnian Muslims are increasingly becoming target of Islamophobic media attacks and unfair accusations. The world news agencies increasingly use expressions like "rise of Shia factor in the Middle East", "Shia revival", "expansion of Shiism" in describing events in Iraq and Lebanon. These expressions also have their echo in the Bosnian Media.

1.4. Homogenous Sunni community

The Shias are minority in the area dominated by the majority Sunni group. Powerful Muslim political parties continue to identify closely with the Bosnian [Sunni] Islamic tradition. Some leaders of the Bosnian Islamic Community (BIC) are also significantly involved in politics, and becoming increasingly vocal during the pre-election campaign period. Religious sermons and services were sometimes misused for campaigning purposes. Potentially, local imams and politicians can contribute to intolerance and enmity towards the Bosnian Shias through public statements and on occasion in sermons.

1.5. Strong Wahhabi influence

It is noticeable that some of the Wahhabi oriented ulama have manage to penetrate into the leadership of the BIC. As result, in areas where Wahhabis have gained adherents Muslims are deeply divided over how to worship, dress, and perform certain ceremonies, like namaz e jum'ah. Until recently among ordinary Bosnian Muslims there was no strong sense of belonging to Hanafi Sunni madhab. However, Wahhabi onslaught by which they are blatantly denying Bosnian Muslims their centuries old Islamic tradition is awakening them. The leadership of the BIC is taking some measures to preserve Bosnian Sunni Hanafi Islamic tradition. There is a strong possibility that the pro-Wahhabi elements will try to make out of the emerging Shia community a controversial and politicized case in order to divert the attention of public debates away from them.

1.6. Weak administrative and judicial systems

The Law on Religious Freedom, which came into force in March 2004, allows minority religions in the country to register legally and to operate without unwarranted restrictions. Groups like Ahmadiyas, Bahais, Jehovah Witnesses, Protestants, etc. that applied to the Ministry of Justice were successfully registered. However, the current administrative and judicial systems are often unable to safeguard the rights of religious minorities. These groups, and especially those that claim to be Islamic, operate almost underground because none can guarantee that the local governments and police forces will not allow an atmosphere in which verbal or physical attacks against them could take place.

1.7. Bosnian Shia community

We estimate that in Bosnia there is around 250/300 individuals who would declare themselves as Shia Ithna Asheri Muslims. However, the intensity of their commitments to the Shia identity varies greatly. Many of them are not yet ready to expose themselves as Shia Muslims to the public eye. Also, the fact that the Bosnian Muslims, as an indigenous European population, are surrounded by the hostile Croat and Serb neighbours and placed under the spotlight of often Islamophobic western media, dictates to what extent we can promote the Shia faith at the same time not endanger the survival of the Muslims in Bosnia. For that reason it is of a paramount importance that we are not seen as

someone who is threatening the unity of the Bosnian Muslims by venturing to split them along Sunni Shia line.

APPENDIX NO 2: Activity list

Activity 1: Publishing and distribution of literature

- 1.1 Quarterly magazine Muslimanski zivot
- 1.2 Two book titles per year
- 1.3 Supply books on the Shia Islam to the local libraries
- 1.4 Set up a correspondence course



Activity 2: Programs at the Centre “Kucha bosanska”

- 2.1 Thursday evenings: Namaz, Dua Kumayl, lecture/discussion and niyaz.
- 2.2 Lectures, on different topics every second Friday evening.
- 2.3 15 days Mahe Ramadhan and 11 days Mahe Muharram programmes
- 2.4 Expanding list of invitees to the functions at the centre
- 2.5 Make the Centre an institution for education and research about Ahlul Bayt a.s.
- 2.6 Organize library and reading room that will cater for different ages and interests

Activity 3: The media

- 3.1 Radio/TV programmes, DVD production (dubbing from English, Arabic...)
- 3.2 Offer scholarships for the media related courses

Activity 4: Public relations

- 4.1 Building rapport with organisations and individuals sympathetic to the Shi'a.
- 4.2 Establishing contacts with professors and students at the schools and universities
- 4.3 Visiting relevant authorities and organisations to explain who we are.
- 4.4 Occasionally inviting members of the civic authorities to the programmes.
- 4.5 Involved in the local community projects, e.g. campaigning for the street lights, telephone lines, etc.
- 4.6 Helping those in genuine need by small donations on humanitarian grounds.

Activity 5: Intra-Muslim dialogue

- 5.1 Building a strong rapport with the local Sunni jamaat on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.
- 5.2 Occasionally attending programs at the Sunni mosque
- 5.3 Keeping away from inter-Muslims disputes and hostilities.
- 5.4 Engaging Muslim intellectuals and scholars in close circle debates

Activity 5: Children and youth

- 5.1 Saturday/Sunday madrasah
- 5.2 Quiz events
- 5.3 Community based sport activities
- 5.4 Trips and camping

Activity 6: Islamic debate club

- 6.1 Promote the values of open-minded dialog, thorough understanding and fair judgment.
- 6.2 Provide the Shi'a an opportunity to present rational arguments and quality evidence on issues concerning a public, social, or religious topic of current interest.

Activity 7: Book club

- 7.1 Encourage reading culture by having regular group discussions of selected books.

Activity 8: Medical screening programme

- 8.1 Organize an annual medical screening programme.

Activity 9: Mutual visits of the Shi'a converts of Europe (Italy, Poland ...)

- 9.1 At least once a year the Bosnian Shi'a converts meet with the Shi'a converts of other European countries as a self-confidence boosting exercise.

Activity 10: Friendly society

- 10.1 Designed to assist community members upon the happening of specified contingencies or in adversity.
- 10.2 Nurture a spirit of self-help and self-reliance and discourage dependence upon the state or charity.

Activity11: English Language

- 11.1 Set up an Islamic English Course whereby English is taught using specially designed Islamic text books.

Activity 12: Human resources - Muballigheen / Zakirs

- 12.1 Spot potential talents among the Shi'a children and support them in becoming future religious educators and leaders of the community.
- 12.2 Send 4-5 students to the Qum Summer Camps.

Activity13: Self-financing

- 13.1 Create diversified funding base which will adequately support all of the programs. Look into investing in property, open shops, offer services and manufacturing;
- 13.2 Introducing membership subscription
- 13.3 EU and other sources of funding