



# An Overview of The World Federation Strategic Plan



**THE  
WORLD  
FEDERATION**

OF KHOJA SHIA ITHNA-ASHERI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Registered Charity in UK - No. 282303

## Dedication

This plan is dedicated to the awaited Imam who will establish equity, justice and truth, and will overcome injustice and oppression.

“I do not fear poverty amongst my Ummah more than I fear the consequences of poor planning”

*Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)*

## About this document

**This document is an overview of the World Federation strategic plan. It will outline the key issues and results of the strategic planning process, including why and how the strategic plan was launched, what was learnt and what has happened with the information gathered. It will give a flavour of the main findings and recommendations for moving forward.**

## About the strategic planning process

The community that the World Federation exists to serve is at a unique point in its history, at the beginning of the new millennium. In this environment the World Federation has greater responsibilities to interact with grass-root community members to find out their needs and take appropriate steps to meet these challenges. The strategic planning process was launched in order to understand and devise a way to meet these needs.

The key steps in setting up the strategic planning process were:

- Instruction from World Federation President
- Setting up of the team
- Data gathering through a survey of the worldwide community
- Data collation of the surveys and analysis of documents and trends
- Sharing results with Boards and Desks and then making recommendations, devising objectives and planning in conjunction with them.

The strategic planning process took place over a 10 month period, with a deadline to report to the triennial conference in October 2003.

The strategic planning process itself reflects the intention behind it - that it be an objective and unbiased review. The methods used to gather and analyse data are fully in accordance with industry best practice and qualified individuals have been tasked with delivering areas of expertise so that the strategic planning process can stand up to any external rigorous assessment. While many of the challenges and aspirations that the community faces are not new, the method of the strategic planning exercise in which these items were identified and will be solved, is new. For the first time at a global level, the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim community on an **individual** level was asked what it expects from the World Federation.

## “Where are we now?”

### A snapshot of the community in 2003

The first step of the strategic planning process was to determine how the World Federation is doing today and what are the current concerns of community members. Through a systematic approach of surveying community members around the globe the strategic planning team was able to obtain this information under two categories:

1. The Community Today: What are the major concerns for community members today?
2. Perception of the World Federation: What does the community think of the World Federation?

The reason for this was that the World Federation needs to have a clear understanding of the issues and trends affecting the community at this point in time so that any planning is effective and targeted.

### How was the community surveyed?

A major component of the strategic planning process was to objectively survey the worldwide community to understand their needs and aspirations. To this end, a large representative group of people was surveyed covering most regions, age groups and gender. The responses of these surveys built the foundation to the strategic direction of the World Federation. The community was asked about the issues facing it under eight broad areas. These were: education, employment, medical care, religious persecution, Islamic needs and the needs of youth, seniors and women.

### The Community Today

**Secular education:** The community strongly agreed that access to secular education is expensive. In some regions such as Africa and North America, this was an especially strong concern. This is also an issue for younger community members in the 19-24 age range.

**Employment:** The community was asked whether they thought it is easy to find a decent job. Community members in Europe and Africa feel that finding a decent job is relatively more difficult and this sentiment is especially felt by women in the community.

**Medical Care:** Community members were asked about their access to medical care. In this case, the survey showed strong regional trends with community members in Africa and Pakistan stating that access to medical care for them is a serious issue.

**Religious Persecution:** Community members were in agreement that religious persecution is a serious issue. Post 9/11 there is general agreement that the world has become an unfriendly place for Muslims. While this was a community-wide feeling, some regional specifics were highlighted. Community members in Pakistan are highly concerned about increasing violence between Shias and Sunnis while those in the West such as the United States and Europe are generally concerned about religious persecution.

**Islamic Education:** The community was asked about the effectiveness of dhakireen as transmitters of religious knowledge and the effectiveness of the programmes run at their

local centres. The survey showed that much needs to be done in this area to meet the community's requirements. The results indicated that community members felt that dhakireen were not as effective as they should be at communicating with them. This feeling varied by region. Community members in Africa and the Middle East felt that dhakireen were able to communicate reasonably well. In the United States, there was a strong sentiment that the dhakireen were ineffective as transmitters of religious knowledge. This view was shared by the 19-24 age group across all regions. In general the community was lukewarm about whether their local community centre programmes served their needs, which was particularly highlighted by the youth and seniors.

**Needs of youth, seniors and women:** The community was asked about how well the needs of these three particular groups are served. Generally the scores across all groups were low with most community members stating that the community does not understand or meet the needs of any of these groups. In particular women are seen as being the most neglected members of the community, and all regions felt strongly that much more needs to be done to meet their requirements.

### **Perception of the World Federation**

Most community members have heard of the World Federation at least by name. There is, however a wide variation in the awareness of its activities. Just over 50% know that it is involved in promoting Islamic education and providing medical support, just over one third believe the World Federation meets the needs of seniors or youth, while only 30% believe that the World Federation supports secular education or works to meet women's needs.

In all areas, expectations of the World Federation and community needs are very high. This indicates that the community wants the World Federation to be fulfilling these needs.

## **“Where do we need to go?”**

**The strategic planning process has reinforced the original vision of the World Federation to promote the Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim faith, to work to relieve poverty in the community and to continue in the education of the community. The strategic planning process works to achieve this vision, not only in the context of the community's position today, but also with an understanding of what the community's expectations and aspirations are from the World Federation for the future.**

In addition to understanding the issues community members face today outlined in the "Where are we now" section, it is critical to understand what are the expectations and aspirations for the World Federation for the future. In order to get a broad understanding of these, three approaches were taken:

- Survey results - a survey of the community's aspirations
- Desktop research - an analysis of documents written by the community to ascertain aspirations
- External analysis - an analysis of external factors that will affect the community

## Survey Results

The community was surveyed as to their needs and the aspirations they have with regards to the World Federation. The results show that the community views the work of the World Federation as extremely important. There is high demand across a range of areas and topics. Examples include:

- Demand for **Islamic education** is high, building on the relative dissatisfaction with the quality of current services. This is reflected across all regions and especially among the youth.
- **Medical support** is a high priority area, especially for seniors and in Pakistan.
- There is strong demand for assistance with **secular education** and also for assistance with **career and professional** advice.
- The community overwhelmingly demands steps to address the needs of the **youth**. This was the case across all regions and all age groups.
- The needs of the **seniors** and **women** are similarly high demand areas.
- **Financial transparency** is a key requirement.

The community views some activities as more important than others. These are addressing the unique needs of the youth, working with the ulema and dhakireen to deliver appropriate Islamic knowledge effectively and addressing the needs of women.

In general the community perceives the World Federation not to be as effective as it could be. The feeling of perceived ineffectiveness is not related to the actual effectiveness of the organisation. Hence, the poor view of the community on the effectiveness of the World Federation is one of the challenges that the strategic plan seeks to address - how to bridge the gap between the expectations and the perception that needs are not being met.

## Desktop research

Desktop research involved examining and analysing documents that have been created by our community. By extracting trends and themes from these documents it is possible to understand what the community wants to accomplish. In this analysis several types of documents were examined. This included reviewing historical records and analysing documents that included conference reports, annual reports, Board and Desk reports and magazines such as Insight and Shia World for recurring themes and trends.

The analysis identified 5 key and recurring themes that underpin the World Federation's past and present work over the past ten years. Some themes have been identified as being part of existing action plans and give an indication of the direction in which the World Federation has been heading. The themes refer to **the way in which the World Federation needs to operate based on its own analysis** at Executive, Board and Desk level if it is to achieve its vision.

### **Education must underpin all our activities**

All findings and analysis point to the importance of education, both secular and religious. This needs to be a key component of the long-term objectives of all the Boards and Desks. Examples include:

- Creation of a confidential network of health professionals in the community to improve medical knowledge.
- Provision of education to those who cannot afford it.

### **Centralisation is the key for coordination**

As the community continues to spread out across the globe, there is a call for a strong central body to ensure coordination, share best practice and develop communications networks. Examples include:

- Encouraging the sharing of best practices across Jamaats.
- A seniors desk to serve as a central body coordinating the efforts of seniors' groups at the regional and Jamaat level.

### **Networking can bring together like-minded individuals for the good of the community**

Networking is seen as vital to realise the talent and opportunities within our community. People should be encouraged to meet and exchange ideas, communicate problems and share best practices. Examples include:

- Networking among students and professionals is essential to the transfer of professional knowledge.
- Publication of a directory and newsletters for seniors in Gujarati and English.

### **Community members are looking for a progressive and modern mindset**

Much of the debate and thinking over the past 10 years has focused on community members wishing to see a shift in the mindset of community institutions to become more receptive to new ways of working. Community members are becoming increasingly discontented with doing things the way they have always been done. Examples both current and anticipated include:

- Fighting apathy among the youth through modern and relevant programming.
- Involving women in all our functions and in Jamaat leadership positions.

### **We need greater involvement from all segments of the community**

Increasing the number of people in all functions of the World Federation is vital to furthering the community's work. Examples include:

- Our own youth need to become more involved in pursuing religious education so we are not dependent on scholars who may be unfamiliar with our unique needs.
- Establishment of a Women's Desk at the World Federation level.



## External analysis

**After examining the documents produced within the community through the desktop research, the strategic planning team investigated trends that are occurring outside the community.**

This involved regional analysis that illustrates the major issues facing the regions our community lives in by the year 2015, an examination of the major global trends affecting the world and the implications of the external global analysis on the World Federation.

Seven major global drivers and trends have been identified to have a profound influence on our community by 2015. These include demographic changes, natural resources and environmental issues and the effects of scientific and technological development, all of which will create opportunities and constraints. Other factors will be the growth of the global economy and globalisation issues as well as the likelihood of future conflict. The role of the United States as the most powerful country will be another key influence. An example of the implication of this analysis is re-considering the option of registering as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) at the UN to allow greater involvement in development and emergency projects at a local as well as international level.

As the World Federation works with local Jamaats in planning for the future, keeping in mind and incorporating the above trends will help make sure the community is prepared for the future.

### “How are we going to get there?”

**It is clear that the demand and aspirations of the grass-roots of the community are very high. They expect the World Federation to deliver. The challenge for the World Federation is in meeting these expectations and the strategic plan is part of the process to meet those expectations.**

The strategic planning exercise indicates an investment in the infrastructure of the World Federation - through the implementation of a systematic planning process and investment in our key resources - that of the staff and volunteers.

A systematic planning process involves detailed planning. This will involve the Boards and Desks defining their objectives, understanding current resources and the resources needed to meet the objectives. Targets will be tied to performance and progress tracked.

Most major charitable and voluntary organisations set 5 year targets and measure performance against them, and although this type of planning can be time-intensive, it can lead to substantial time and cost savings later, as well as transparency and accountability for the organisation. In many ways it formalises the way the World Federation has already been working at Board and Desk level but gives renewed focus to the question "How are we going to get there?"

This is a substantial task but it needs to be done so as to maximise our efforts and our potential. Current structures and resources will not be able to cope if objectives are to be delivered. This means that the community at large will need to be prepared to support

the World Federation by providing adequate financial as well as human resources to manage its own high expectations.

At the same time it is important to remember that the World Federation cannot be everywhere for everyone. It is critical that a significant part of the plans of the World Federation include strategies to engage the Regional Federations and local Jamaats. By acting as a coordinator and facilitator for regional federations and local Jamaats, the World Federation will be able to accomplish much more than as a sole actor using a top heavy approach. As the president of the World Federation said in his vision statement of August 2000:

*"It is my firm belief that in its role as a nucleus of the community, the World Federation needs to redouble its efforts to reach out to the community network of Jamaats and Regional Organizations, as an enabler and facilitator in their endeavours to serve the community. In the same spirit of solidarity, it needs the reciprocal commitment from the Jamaats and the Regional Organizations. Let us seize the opportunity towards even better coordination and work in unison to maximize our resources."*

## Next Steps and Summary

**By studying the survey data generated by the strategic planning exercise, the Boards and Desks are better equipped to meet the needs of the community. The next step in the planning process was to set objectives to provide for the community. The strategic planning team worked with each Board and Desk to develop a series of objectives that answer the community needs that have been clarified through the strategic planning process.**

The next step in the strategic planning process is to formulate detailed plans that the Boards and Desks can follow to meet these objectives. Part of this planning process will be the assessment of current resources, both human and financial, and a study of what additional resources, again both human and financial, will be needed to accomplish the objectives.

These objectives and plans will provide the foundation for the future activities of the World Federation. If successful, the World Federation will be well-positioned to not only engage in critical activities, but also be seen to be performing these activities effectively.

In conclusion one can do no better than to quote the words of the Qur'an:

“Allah never changes the grace He has bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their hearts and that is because Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing”

*Glorious Qur'an 8:53*