

Audhubillahi Minash Shatyaneer Rajeem

Bismillahir Rahmaneer Raheem

Raabi Shahri Sadri Was Yasirly Amri wahlul Uktatum Min Lisani Yafqahu Kawli

My Dear Elders, Brothers and Sisters Assalamun Alaykum

Condolences to you all and to the Imam of our time on this intense period of grief following on from the martyrdom of Sayyid Shuhuda (AS) and the grief endured by the Ahlul Bayt (AS).

The Khoja Shia Ithna Asheris, are spread over 5 continents and we number less than 125,000. When we trace our origins we realise that our forefathers were indeed Hindus, their religion then evolved into a mish-mash faith called Satpanth and as time went on our community turned into a Nizari Ismaili one before eventually they had the Tawfeeq to fully practice the Ja'fari Madhab. Five Generations later our community still has a strong sense of identity and it has created a plethora of Jamaats and Centres that give us the platform for our spiritual growth.

My talk today will focus on some of the progress of The World Federation of KSIMC during the term 2011-2014 and more importantly on some of the challenges that our community may face in the not too distant future as we strive to protect our Madhab and our religious values.

PROGRESS OF THE WORLD FEDERATION 2011-2014 TERM.

At the last Conference in Dar Es Salaam in 2011 an Action Plan for the term was approved with 93 areas of implementation - in the field of Islamic Education, Secular Education, Family Affairs, Health, Economic Development and the Zainabiya Child Sponsorship Scheme.

Don't worry I won't list out all the action points it can be found on the website. In particular, however, there are 3 main themes of this term:

1. The establishment of the Madrasah Centre of Excellence.
2. The eradication of poverty in the Khoja Community over the next 15 years.
3. Connecting our Community together.

It is these 3 over-arching themes that I would like to focus on today.

MCE

The Madrasah Centre of Excellence was set up over a year ago and it has four key work streams: (1) Curriculum Development (2) Teachers Training (3) Assessment & Evaluation and (4) Learning Resources. The idea behind all the work-streams is not only increase the 'Ta'alim' (knowledge) of our children but to also increase their 'Tarbiyat' (understanding and empathy too). In short the vision of the MCE is to 'nurture piety and instil Islamic values'.

(1) Curriculum Development

Our 157 Madaris have been up to now, to a great extent, working in silos. Curriculum have been developed by our community and the need to update them is there. In particular, we need to look at new teaching methodologies in to make sure the curriculums used by our Madaris are at the best possible level. A team made up of Sheikh Safder Jaffer, Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (of Toronto), Sheikh Khalil Jaffer has been set up to work on this mission. The idea is to first create a framework, then a syllabus and then eventually an integrated curriculum. We mustn't re-invent the wheel but use the good work that is already out there as our foundation. A study of all current syllabi has been completed and the first stages of creating a fit for purpose framework has begun. This task is by no

means straight forward and is indeed quite technical. Furthermore we must make sure that it consults Madaris fully and wins their buy-in.

(2) Teachers Training

This is in fact the most important area of the project. We have 1,858 teachers in our community. Our teachers are people we can be proud of, they have given up their time, they volunteer and they do so for nothing but reward of the hereafter. But how much investment in them to do we do? The Teachers Training team, led by Sayyid Ali Naqvi, is looking to create a full systematic teacher training programme to add value to the training already done by Madaris today and to better skill the teachers we have in our community.

(3) Assessment and Evaluation

This innovative area of work is to allow Madaris to self-inspect through tools given to them by The World Federation and for them to set their own goals and areas of improvement. So far the pilot assessment have occurred in Hyderi, Dar Es Salaam and Nairobi and the feedback has been very positive.

(4) Learning Resources

This is an area of great focus for 2013. By February, inshAllah, the learning resources website will be complete where materials for teachers and students will be placed. The MCE team will then work on creating new resources to help our Madaris.

We pray for the strength and success of the MCE and all our Madaris worldwide and it is good to see that the leadership of our community has realised the critical importance of Madaris in the growth and development of our community.

Eradication of Poverty

The World Federation has set up a goal of eradicating poverty in the Khoja community within 15 years. This is a lofty goal and one that is not easy one to achieve. However, it is high time we set such a target and help remove absolute poverty in our community.

Many community workers have spotted a trend of greater extremes in our community. The difference between the have and the have nots has increased markedly. Just look at our community in East Africa today - where the wealthy are extremely prosperous whilst the deserving can barely afford school fees, accommodation and their basic living expenses. Our community cannot afford to ignore our own deserving. In this term so far, The World Federation has funded various microfinance programmes in Karachi Jamaat, Jamaats under the Africa Federation and new schemes are being launched in our Jamaats in India. Furthermore, we have significantly increased the Ramadan Relief contribution to help the Khoja deserving, funded a widow housing complex in Dar Es Salaam and committed to increasing child education sponsorship for our community children in Africa. But these activities have been sporadic and we need to do much more.

A full strategy paper is being drawn up by the Secretariat so that a holistic and co-ordinated programme of activities can be created to target poverty in our community.

Connecting our Community

The last main theme of the term is connecting our community together. We need to bring about greater reminders of our community heritage. That is why we have begun on a documentary of the history of our Khoja Documentary, published the excellent book 'An Endangered Species' as well as begun work on the international business and professionals directory.

Furthermore, the Secretariat (through a dedicated team) has begun the audacious work of creating a Generational Plan by undertaking a comprehensive census of the community (in each and every one of our Jamaats) during 2013. This is a mammoth and historic task and your time, effort and support for this is much needed. The data received from this international census will give us important demographic information and also give us a vital picture of our community to help The World Federation and Regional Federations to create a Generation Plan with appropriate activities for the requirements of our upcoming Generation, inshAllah.

CHALLENGES FACING OUR COMMUNITY

Brothers and sisters, with your kind permission, I would like to spend a few minutes to discuss some of the key challenges that our community now faces. There are many challenges that I do not have the time to cover today such as the rising cost of education, the rising tide of Salafism and Wahhabism in the East and the West, the Islamophobia that has become an accepted norm etc etc.

There is one challenge that I do want to particularly focus on.

If we evaluate our short history, we will come to conclude that our forefathers had succeeded in many ways. They were able to pass onto us the Ja'fari Madhab. When we analyse how they did this, the answer is quite clear. Ayatullah Sistani in his advice to our community leaders, such as his advice to a French delegation in 2005, makes it clear the road to success. He advised: 'language and culture unify and bring people together in their own family. This provides the religious attachment and its principles to be transmitted from generation to generation. The absence of this sense of partnership and unity will certainly lead to a dispersion of the people in their own community after two or three generations. Consequently, religious interest will diminish. This will lead the community to deviate and be lost.'

Brothers and Sisters, when we look at the other Shia communities that had left India at the same time as ours (the Bihari Shia and the Shia from UP) we find that none of them could pass on their religion to their next generation.

The reason is that they lost their culture and their heritage and with that they lost their faith. Bearing this in mind, we must sit up and think about our future.

The roles of our Jamaats, our Regional Federation and The World Federation has been critical to our past and will be critical to our future too.

One of our past community leaders has written: 'Khoja Qaim Jamaat-o-federations say hain, tanha kutch nahin.'

Our community faces the challenge of widespread apathy and disinterest in community activities. This may be deemed to be politics that affects and withers away the interest of our youth, the lack of opportunities available to serve or indeed because our community institutions have not done enough to gain their involvement. But we must find better ways of connecting with today's generation if we are to preserve our community. We must also recognise the importance of our Khoja heritage, our language. A Zamana maa apri Gujarati ane Kutchi Zabaan vaparvama nathi avti. Apri faraj che ke apri kom ane juvaniyo mate mahenat kare ane Gujarati vadhare vaparvama ave.

We will need to preserve the unity of our community, eradicate any personal agenda and focus solely and purely on achieving the pleasure of Allah (swt). If we can do this, then and only then will we be able to increase the spirituality of our community.

Brothers and Sisters, thank you for your time today. I'm here also to listen to your ideas, your questions and your suggestions.

There are many other challenges that we need to be aware of that that I couldn't address to you today. For example I couldn't talk to you today about the challenges facing our Shia brothers in Pakistan, Bahrain or Syria - countries where The World Federation is active on a day to day basis with welfare and morale support. I couldn't talk you about the attempts to undermine the institution of Marjaee and the attempts which are prevalent outside and even within the Shia community. I couldn't talk to you of the progress of the Zainabiya Child Sponsorship Scheme or indeed the work of our Islamic Education team or about the implementation of the Women's Needs Assessment.

However, I did try to give you an insight about the 3 main themes of the term, the creation of the Census Team and indeed one challenge that affects our community and its future.

Let us end by praying to Allah (swt) to grant us the Tawfeeq to serve this community with a Khuloos an open to Niyyat, to protect our Ulama in particular our Grand Maraje in Najaf and Qom; and lastly to hasten the re-appearance of our 12th Imam (AJTFS).

Wassalmun Alaykum