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In the Name of Allah, the Most-Compassionate, the Most-Merciful.

In response to some emails on the MN Muslims Group regarding the participation of American-born Muslims and women in IJCM (Islamic Jurisprudence Council of Minnesota). First, let me express my appreciation for your concern about the Muslim community and your sincere interest in promoting it.

Second, I will try to answer some of the concerns raised by the respected sisters and brothers, and I will make my answer in points.

With regards to the participation of the American born/raised Muslims:

1) In the Islamic work, in general:

a) It is of great concern to us that this category of the Muslim community is near absent in our mosques and organizations. It is a major source of distress for all of us who witness this reality because we, like you, are concerned about the future of Islam in this land. I am mainly referring to the children of immigrants, since the native Muslims do participate in the work of *da'wah*, and have their own organizations and *masjids*.

b) I do not think we, immigrants, are excluding the in referenced groups of people in the *majority* of cases. To the contrary, many times people are over welcoming to any participation from the American-born Muslims, and if you are one you may get more popular than world renowned scholars after you only finish a bachelor in Islamic studies. That is because of the people's well understood eagerness to see them carry the torch. As a side, in *Dar al-Farouq*, for instance, which may be classified by some of you as "ultra-orthodox" the president of the mosque is an American born, convert who does not wear either a *thobe* or a *kufi*. He prays *fajr* at the *masjid* and goes out to some elderly people in the neighborhood – all are non-Muslims - to help them out with their needs, including mowing their lawn, then he goes to his work – he is an architect – and after he comes back from work he and his wife come to the *masjid* to take care of it and further their Islamic education.

c) Even if these brothers and sisters were not part of the leadership they should have continued to come to the mosques like the many immigrants who are not part of the leadership or at odds with it sometimes. If you abandon the congregational prayers, communal services and the mosques because you don't like the people in charge, then that may be why Allah didn't make you in charge. Leadership is earned after hard work and sacrifices. I do remember myself at the age of nine, sweeping and mopping the floor of the *masjid* and its *bathrooms* after our *Quranic* memorization *halaqas*, and at the age of seventeen, the elders in that very *masjid* (in Alexandria, Egypt) choose me to be the *Khateeb*. I was not related to any one of them, and they had children my age and older.

That confirmed to me the meaning of a prophetic hadeeth, in which the Prophet said: "My nation is like rain, you wonder which part of it is best, the first or the last."

d) It is not a hard task – if they felt alienated - to start their own mosques and or organizations; I don't think we, immigrants, would or can bar them from doing so. It costs less than one hundred dollars to start and register an organization. As far as starting a *masjid*, they must know how to do this better than me, being raised here, but if anyone needed help with the procedure, I would be glad to assist. The Twin Cities definitely need many more mosques and/or organizations to accommodate all.

Allah says what means: "To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) Towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you Together. For Allah Hath power over all things." 2/148

If any group of Muslims started any organization or embarked on the establishment of any mosque, we (IJCM) will be glad to support them, and we will come – if welcome -to take part in their activities, so long as they preach the same Islam preached more than 1400 years ago by Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and give him peace).

e) It is only natural that the people who start a mosque or an organization and spend their time, effort, and money to see their dream be a reality would run the very organization they founded. This is different from dictatorship because any one can start an organization when they want and the diversity of the organizations will only add to the richness of the Islamic work. Also it may help accommodate some of those who may feel alienated at one particular place.

f) Those who worked with me, Hatem el-Hag Aly, on any project know how much I diligently pursue people from the aforementioned categories to make them in charge of our activities. I am most pleased when I get invited to activities – usually out of state – that are run by American born Muslims, and I have just come back from Houston, Texas a few weeks ago and expressed to many brothers – who may be reading this reply - my joy to have been invited to a *da'wah* day – not MSA activity, which would be naturally run by youth - by a group of American born Muslims, who were in their twenties, some of which were women incidentally, and almost all were originally Pakistani, yet they had no problem listening to me, an Arab immigrant male!

2. Regarding IJCM:

a) This organization was meant to be consultative and mainly concerned with the issuance of religious decrees and promoting an authentic understanding of the religion. The members are mostly Imams of some of the major mosques in the Twin Cities who work compatibly to each other.

b) Whenever a group of Muslims come together to work it is expected of all sincere Muslims to be happy for that initiative and support them at least with *duaa* (prayers). We should support all positive initiatives or at least refrain from baseless accusations. For Allah has said what means:

"O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin" 49/12

It is quite frustrating to many active people to get bombarded by negativity whenever they embark on a new project. They must however disregard the criticism, if they are truly working for Allah's pleasure alone.

c) We made sure in the introduction of IJCM to the community to use “*a*” versus “*the*”. Thus, IJCM is meant to serve as “*a*” religious authority not “*the*” and “*a*” source of guidance not “*the*”. Those who find themselves interested in starting another group have nothing to prevent them from doing so. There is no monopoly. Ultimately, people will choose to follow those they trust the most and see them working hard for the community. In case there is more than one group and all of them are hardworking and qualified and earn the trust of the people, or at least some people, that would only add to the strength of the community.

No sensible person would deny that there are some people who found themselves represented by IJCM, and put their trust in that body of scholars. They also have a right!

d) Due to its nature, IJCM was meant to include members with formal religious education, and preferably a PhD, or a Master’s, and may include some of those who are on their way to attain that level of education for the efficient operation of the organization. Had the main function of IJCM been to write English poetry, it would have been important – though not necessary - to be a native English speaker or American born. However, if IJCM were to be about decreeing religious edicts, which it is emphatically, then the knowledge of Quran and its sciences and interpretation, Hadeeth and its sciences, Fiqh and its fundamentals are all of the utmost importance, and yes Arabic (with a clear distinction between being proficient in Arabic and being an Arab, in fact many of my *shoyookh* are not Arabs, but they know Arabic a lot better than most Arabs). We must agree on this if we are referring to the same Islam preached by Prophet Muhammad and practiced by his companions. I hope and believe we all are referring to that Islam, because if some of us are referring to a different version – sometimes referred to as American grown Islam- then there is no platform to stand on it to have a discussion, for we believe Islam did grow up and reach its age of full strength when Allah sent onto his last messenger (May Allah bless him and give him peace) the following verse, (the meaning)

"This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." 5/3

e) The council was not created to be an-all inclusive organization of all knowledgeable people in Minnesota. Thus, it does not have to accept all people who meet the above criteria, yet if there are American born/raised Muslims in Minnesota who meet these criteria, the council would seriously *consider* them and would be glad to have them as members, as long as there is some degree of compatibility between the members, for the greater interest of the council. In other words, a person who may have convictions that we should have women Imams - though women can be Imams of other women, but not men - or that we should have mosques for the openly homosexual members of the community, such people, in all honesty, are not compatible with the group and will probably not be welcome to join. After all, it is a religious organization, not *required* by the law, to meet any quotas and given *by law* the right to maintain its own inner regulations and by- laws.

f) The geopolitical division of Muslims is foreign to the religion of Islam likewise is the ethnic, gender, or age based division.

I believe, most of the people who take the time to discuss issues pertaining to the community are sincere, therefore I would encourage them to have more tolerance of their brethren, and love for the community and to work hard for the best interest of

Islam and Muslims, even through social services, which is much needed and doesn't require extensive resources. The more we involve our selves in working for the community, the less resentment we will have for it.

If some didn't feel like starting their own activities, then they may join other organizations that are closer to their ideals, or more representing of them, and fortunately there are organizations run by American born and raised. After all if they still uncomfortable working alone or with any existing institution, then the least they may do is to be positive and happy that some people are doing some of the work required of all of us, Muslims.

Regarding the participation of women, I have been working on a reply, but due to many engagements in and out of state, it is taking me a long time to finish it and for that accept my apology. *InshaAllah*, once I finish it I will forward it to you.

I have learned throughout my years of work in *da'wah* that you can't please all people, this is also what our most beloved Prophet Muhammad had taught us, and He also taught us to focus on pleasing Allah.

Some or even many of you who will read my message will not be satisfied with the answers presented here above, and they are entitled to disagreeing, but I would request all of us to keep the debate at a high level, sustain our brotherhood and pray to Allah to make us sincere in everything we say or do.

If I failed to send any further replies regarding this issue, it will not be because I don't care about or don't have time for your concerns, because my best use of time is when I invest in the nation of my most beloved Prophet Muhammad, yet my lack of reply will be solely because I don't have much more to say.

May Allah guide us all, and may He preserve our love of each other for His sake.

Your brother in Islam,

Dr. Hatem M. el-Hag Aly