First Commencement

Equipped with sharper critical thinking skills, a fresh approach to religious and social sciences, and an eagerness to face the challenges of the ummah and American society, the first class of the Intensive Master's Degree Program in Islamic Studies at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) in Leesburg, VA graduated July 3, 2004.

The 11 graduates, representing diverse educational, professional and ethnic backgrounds, are the first to complete the accelerated, ten month program of discussion, research and writing in more than a dozen subjects, including Qur'anic sciences, hadith sciences, Islamic conflict resolution, comparative religion and civilization, comparative fiqh and Islamic political thought. Each course explored foundational tenets, theories and methods of implementation, while perpetually reflecting upon Islamic approaches to social sciences.

GSISS President Dr. Taha Jabir Alalwani, addressing the graduation ceremony, said that the program taught students to "understand Islam from the sources of Islam, not from the legacy, heritage, tradition and culture of the Muslim ummah, and how to develop American Islamic culture, not for the Muslim community only, but for America."

He added that the graduates are "people of mission trying to remind the whole community, American community, of the value of good, how to avoid evil, how to develop the earth."

The School provides a unique perspective, approach and environment in which the practice and understanding of Islam in the American context and elsewhere are examined and evaluated. Commencement speaker Bonita McGee said, "You can't build that type of foundation anywhere else except at a school like this."

Classes were designed to reflect a progressive accumulation of knowledge in line with the School's mission, including re-evaluating Islamic knowledge in light of the fundamental sources and linking values with religion and civilization, Alalwani said.

"I tried to teach them... the role of religion in ... society ... in building and developing the earth, not to corrupt and destroy the earth," Alalwani continued. "You need to develop... this life, implement civilization or *imran* (...civilization with a sense of values) on this earth to be saved in the Hereafter."

Other speakers included Keynote speaker Dr. Sulayman Nyang, who outlined the challenges facing Muslim scholars and intellectuals in the modern world; faculty member Dr. Louis Cantori, who addressed the difference between the absolute and relative principles of Islam; faculty member Dr. Mona Abul-Fadl who spoke about the remarkable contribution of women to the study of Islam; and School alumnus Ahmed Salem, who offered practical advice to the new graduates.

The Class of 2004 includes Amatullah V. Abdul-Karim, Nashiah Ahmad, Rumman Badeges, Maliha Balala, Jihene Ben Moussa, Humera Khan, Jerusha Lamptey, Bonita McGee, Syed-Mohsin Naquvi, Daoud Nassimi and Muhsin Shahid.

(For information on GSISS and the intensive MA program in Islamic Studies, contact (703) 779-7477 or visit www.siss.edu.)

—By Nashiah Ahmad, a journalist and inaugural chair of the ISNA Convention Reporters Committee.

A Muslim View on Domestic Relations

CARe, Communities Against Rape, a state-funded organization, dedicated its fifth annual multicultural gathering in Carmel, IN, May 12, to "Getting to Know Muslims In Sexual and Domestic Violence Work" with Sharifa Alkhateeb as the guest speaker.

She spoke on topics such as Muslim scriptural basis for treatment of women; understanding the Muslim marital contract and how it affects sexual and domestic violence issues; how to effectively interface with Muslim communities; and habits of conflict resolution in Muslim families.

Alkhateeb is founder and director of the Peaceful Families Project, a nationwide family dynamics and violence awareness program within the Muslim community, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. An independent researcher, she conducted the first nationwide survey of domestic violence in the Muslim community (1998-2000). She is, also, the founder and interim president of the North American Council for Muslim Women.

Alkhateeb, a seasoned teacher, multicultural specialist, and trainer who has extensive experience working with Fairfax County Public Schools, has produced and hosted a television program called "Middle Eastern Parenting" for that school system. ■

Scholars adorned with their new diplomas with GSISS president and faculty

Professor Wins Award

University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (USP) — a private, coeducational institution founded in 1821 — presented the 2004 Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching to Dr. Salar Alsardary, an associate professor of mathematics.

Dr. Salar Alsardary

Dr. Alsardary, who has been teaching at USP since 1996, also teaches an introductory Arabic language course. He has written several publications, and has given numerous presentations on his research on graph theory and combinatorics. He is a member of the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) and acts as a faculty sponsor for students presenting research papers at the regional MAA meetings.

He received a Ph.D. and an M.A. in mathematics from West Virginia University, an M.S. in mathematics from Mosul University in Iraq, and a B.S. in mathematics from Sulaimania University in Iraq. His Ph.D. thesis was about "paths and cycles in powers of complete graphs."

Justice in Muslim Societies

"Defining & Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies" was the focus of the 5th annual conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (www.islamdemocracy.org) held May 28-29 in Washington, DC.

Prof. Akbar Ahmed

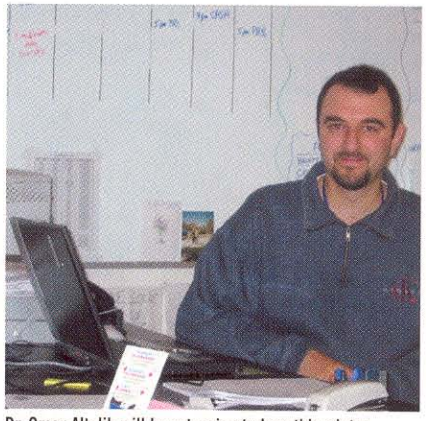
The conference examined the best way to establish justice in Muslim countries and to address prevalent inequalities, injustices and discriminatory practices. Justice (*adl*)—the foundation of democracy—is central to Islam. The Qur'an states that a primary goal and responsibility of Muslims is establishing justice on earth.

This conference provided an opportunity to explore issues such as: the political foundations of justice and their relationship to democracy in Muslim states; What does it mean to say that consensus and consultation are the basis of political justice?; How central is economic justice to democracy in Islamic societies?; Does Islam have a just theory of economics?; What examples from the past and the present can best reflect this theory?; Does social organization limit justice in Islam?; Are the traditional patterns of social organization and authority in Islam just?; What constitutes justice for women in Islamic democracy?; What is the meaning of justice for women in Islamic democracy?; Can women participate as equals to men in society?; How is the justice of religious law (shari'ah) related to democracy?; Is the justice of shari'ah laws democratic?; and What legal structures and protections are required with administer justice?

Prof. Akbar Ahmed of American University served as program chair.

REBUILDING IRAQ

Dr. Omar Hisham Altalib returned from a six month trip to Iraq in June, where he served as an advisor to Iraqi education minister Dr. Aladin Abdulsahib Alwan. Some of the projects Dr. Altalib worked on were: reconstruction and rehabilitation of thousands of Iraqi kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, Iraqi teacher training, obtaining money for Iraqi schools, and soliciting books for Iraqi school libraries.



Dr. Omar Altalib will be returning to Iraq this winter

Dr. Altalib, who received his PhD from the University of Chicago this year, will be returning to Iraq this winter to work with nongovernmental organizations striving to establish good governance and democracy in Iraq.

To donate books, school supplies, and money to Iraqi schoolchildren, contact omar_altalib@hotmail.com.

ONTARIO Condemns Hate

The The Ontario Press Council upheld a complaint by Dr. Mohamed Elmasry, chair of the Canadian Islamic Congress, and Hajara Kutty that "Toronto Star" columnist Rosie DiManno (March 24, 2004) used unnecessarily hurtful language in describing the Arab world as a society where "wickedness is bred in the bone." DiManno used the hateful and inflammatory language while lauding Israel's assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder of the Hamas.

The Council, citing its 1986 policy statement, said while recognizing that the opinions are strongly held by the writer, such words as "bred in the bone" denigrate a whole society. Furthermore, some of the language crosses the line between acceptable and unacceptable and is unnecessarily hurtful.

The Council said it would continue to consider complaints about unnecessarily hurtful language in opinion columns.