

Inter-European Lahore Ahmadiyya Conference in Berlin, May 2007

Report with photographs

This conference, held from Friday 25th to Sunday 27th May 2007 in Berlin, was a joint venture involving our branches in Germany, the Netherlands and the U.K. As *Hazrat Ameer* Dr A.K. Saeed, Head of the World-Wide Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, and his wife Mrs Sabiha Saeed were visiting the Netherlands during these days, they came with the participants from Holland by coach. The several participants from the U.K. *Jama'at* had flown into the two airports in Berlin.

The proceedings began with Friday prayers on the 25th in the historic Berlin Mosque built by our *Jama'at* in the 1920s. In his *khutba* Hazrat Ameer stressed on the need for self-purification, and that instead of following the part of our inner self which tells us to do wrong (*nafs al-ammara*) we should pay heed to the voice of our self-accusing spirit (*nafs al-lawwama*) which reproaches us for doing wrong. The Imam, Muhammad Ali, summarised the *khutba* in German, as he also did later with some of the other talks.

After a break for snacks, the conference proper began in the Mosque with brief opening speeches by Mohamed Mahawat Khan from Holland and Mrs J. Khan of the U.K. Then Yahya Manfred Backhausen, our dedicated and scholarly member from a town near Cologne, delivered an address in English covering in detail the history of the Berlin Mission and Mosque from the beginning till today. Some of the information he gave has been discovered by him by his own research. Mr Backhausen told us during the convention (perhaps not in this speech though) the reason why, during the final assault on Berlin at the end of the Second World War in April and May 1945, the minarets of the Mosque were fired upon by the Soviet troops from across the road. It was that German soldiers had climbed up to the top of the minarets, from where they could observe the position of the enemy forces and direct their own troops on the ground to fire on them. Thus the tops of the minarets were destroyed in this fighting.

Then Imam Muhammad Herzog, a German Muslim convert of long-standing, made a speech in German on Islam and Muslims generally in Germany. Following him, Mohamed Mahawat Khan gave a presentation, with computer slides, about Islamic structures in Holland and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. Besides his own presentation, after the delivery of every speech in the conference Mr Mahawat Khan gave a summary of it in Dutch for the benefit of the large number of participants from Holland.

Saturday

On Saturday there was a morning open session held at a hotel, consisting of three parts. First, the conference organiser, Mr A. Santoe from Rotterdam, gave a slide presentation about the various sections and schools of thought in Islam, their origin, and their history up to the present time. He dealt in some detail with the differences between the four schools of Islamic law or *fiqh*. Then Mr Achmad Hurschid of the Naqshbandi Sufi order gave an introduction to their spiritual practices for the cleansing of the heart. Finally, a panel of four, consisting of these two speakers, Hazrat Ameer and Dr Zahid Aziz, answered questions from the audience. One item raised was that considering that there are several schools of Islamic theology, philosophy and law that have existed for centuries, with some conflicting interpretations, what views did the Promised Messiah express on these differences and which stand-points did he consider as right? Dr Zahid Aziz commented that the Promised Messiah's mission was to restore and repair *faith* in Islam in the hearts of the Muslims, and Hazrat Mirza sahib was more concerned with those issues where a wrong interpretation created doubt in the hearts about the truth of Islam or made Islam subject to criticism, and these he tackled thoroughly. To other points of difference, he did not attach importance as needing resolution.

Another question related to whether a certain strain of Shia-ism, whose extreme beliefs were mentioned by Mr Santoe in his talk, could be considered as Muslim. Mr Backhausen commented that according to the Lahore Ahmadi standpoint those calling themselves Muslims are to be treated by us as Muslims, and whatever their other beliefs are, will be judged by God and not us.

Before the session began, Mr Azhar Ahmad from the U.K. had reminded the audience that this day, 26th May, was the 99th anniversary of the death of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. In commemoration he read out, with emotion, some extracts from the Founder's talks and writings.

Sunday

This session was held in the Mosque. In the morning there were two keynote speeches. The first, by Dr Zahid Aziz, was based on the chapter *Muslims Living with Others* from his recent book *Islam, Peace and Tolerance*. In this speech, extensively quoting from the Holy Quran and Hadith, it was shown that Islam provides a three-fold basis, philosophical, legal and moral, for Muslims to live in peace with non-Muslims. The second speech was by Mr Shahid Aziz, Secretary U.K. *Jama'at*, on Muslim extremist violence and its implications. He stated that the only consequence of such violent acts was to alienate the general population from Islam and Muslims. He also gave some examples of a confrontational approach, such as protests demanding punishments for those who insult Islam, where the protesters achieve nothing, not even the wrong ends they wanted to achieve, and the only result of their vocal efforts was to bring Islam into disrepute.

The afternoon session began with a speech by Hazrat Ameer. He laid stress on the religious teachings and doctrines that Islamic, Christian and Jewish faiths have in common and spoke of the need to bring religions closer together by understanding rather than drive them apart by mutual accusations. Later, there was a TV film presentation showing the contemporary Muslim thinkers Tariq Ramadan and Farid Noor discussing their ideas.

The conference was brought to a close by various speakers expressing best wishes for the future of the Berlin Mosque and Mission. Some funds were raised in this session and donated to the Mosque as well. The Berlin Mission staff and their helpers worked hard in the arrangements of the conference and providing care and hospitality for the participants. The Imam, Muhammad Ali, in particular deserves our gratitude for his work.

See next pages for photographs



Delegates entering Berlin Mosque, Friday, 25th May



Hazrat Ameer delivering Friday Khutba, 25th May 2007



Jumua prayers



Hazrat Ameer opening Friday afternoon's session in Mosque



A section of the audience on Friday afternoon in Mosque



A section of the audience on Friday afternoon in Mosque



Hazrat Ameer opening Saturday's session in Conference Centre



Audience at Saturday's session



Delegates at Mission House, Sunday, 27th May



Delegates entering Mosque, Sunday



Mr Shahid Aziz delivering speech at Sunday's session



A section of the audience, Sunday



Hazrat Ameer closing Convention on Sunday



From left, standing in the Berlin Mosque:
Muhammad Ali (Imam), Hazrat Ameer Dr A.K. Saeed,
Imam Herzog, Tahir Neef, Mohamed Mahawat Khan, Mrs J. Khan,
Manfred Yahya Backhausen