

Monuments Open Day at the Berlin Mosque, September 2008

Report by Muhammad Ali, Imam

In Germany every year the Open Day for monuments is celebrated on the second weekend of September. This year, 2008, it was on September 13-14th.

With Allah's blessing this year, these two days went extremely successfully. This time we organized everything together with the most prestigious private German organization, 'Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz' or DSD (German Foundation for the Conservation of Ancient monuments), to restore the monuments. The President/Incharge for the Berlin section of this organization is the young and very enthusiastic Mr Gunther Paetz. This organization works for the restoration of monuments privately. The President of this organization in Germany is one of the members of the royal family of Germany.

I and our brother Manfred Yahya Backhausen worked together for more than one year with Mr Paetz for preparing the events on these days. It included chalking out plans, discussing ideas, having meetings with other organizations and so on. And last but not least, to post the invitation letters and send email. We sent invitations to some 250 people. The best part is that all the people of DSD are also working voluntarily. Besides earning their livelihood, they work for free for this organization. Mr Paetz told us how he himself made 150 invitation envelopes and was forced to remain awake quite late in the night. I have special admiration for Mr Paetz as he worked very hard to make this event a success, and so it was.

The program for the two days included 3 lectures by me and Manfred Yahya on Saturday. On Sunday I gave one lecture purely on Islam and two lectures together with Manfred Yahya. At the same time as we were giving the lectures, Mr Paetz took small children from the visiting parents and offered them a very interesting and interactive program. So parents stayed with us and the children were taken care of by Mr Paetz. Here I must remark that the involvement and love that Mr Paetz showed while working with children was exemplary. I spoke in my lectures on the history of our movement and our view of Islam, while Manfred Yahya spoke about the history of the Berlin Mosque.

The last program of both days was a recitation from the Quran. Mr Nasir Ahmad from England did the recitation on both days and Manfred Yahya did the translation. There was on both days a silence and feeling of peace and serenity in the mosque after Mr Nasir Ahmad ended his recitation. The program also included the release of a new and very comprehensive book by Manfred Yahya on the history of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (AAIIL) in Europe, especially in Germany. With this book he has documented all the history of the AAIIL in Europe till the present time.

After my introductory words before each lecture, it was always Mr Paetz who spoke after me. He appealed everytime to the audience, saying that this Berlin mosque is a part of society, and the community of this mosque is an integrated community in the society, so we have a responsibility to repair and renovate this mosque. He further told the people that in the beginning he was not sure about us, but as he came in contact with us more and more, he found us to be very friendly, pleasant, tolerant and open to the general community. He praised specially the book by Manfred Yahya which opened to him also many aspect of our community. This book was sold for 12 Euros. Of this, 10 Euros is our printing cost and 2 Euros will go to renovation in the DSD bank account created for us. 27 copies of this book were sold in these two days. All of our other books were also sold on these days. Usually I spoke for 10–15 minutes for every lecture. It was followed by 10–15 minutes of Manfred Yahya's lecture. Most of the times we were engaged by the audience till the next lecture time.

One thing which impressed everyone was that Mr Paetz conducted the children extremely well. The program for children included introducing them to the location of Makkah and Madinah by showing them on maps in which direction one needs to go to Saudi Arabia. Then using the pictures of the mosque edited by me, the children were asked to look at the building and paint the war damage on the pictures at respective places. A comparison between Christianity and Islam was also given to children, drawing comparison between an Imam and a Priest, church bells and *azan* and so on. At the end the children were always brought to the mosque, where they were required to find the word *Allah* in Arabic in the mosque. Another part was to read the first *Kalima* (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet). We wrote the Arabic in German letters, so all children were able to read it correctly. Then we asked them questions. It was simply an un-

forgettable experience to work with the children. The most important contribution was the dedication with which Mr Paetz worked.

We counted 900 visitors and including the late comers the number goes to 1000 approximately. This was also the biggest event which I witnessed in my last 8 years here at the Berlin mosque. We have collected 440 Euros of donations in the money boxes of the DSD, which were specially brought for this day from DSD.

One more notable thing which was impressive was that some people asked me explicitly that they want to give money directly to the mosque. Although I told them that any money given to DSD will in the end also come to us, but still they put money in the boxes of the mosque, telling me specifically that they want to give money to the mosque directly.

The joy felt by us increased as we had very positive comments from the visitors. With visitors in individual conversation, many of them said that now they have a totally different picture of Islam. They were full of appreciation for our tolerant, rational and peaceful view of Islam.

Last but not least, we as the Berlin mosque have decided with DSD together to continue this teamwork a result of which we saw last weekend. DSD has setup a special bank account for the Berlin Mosque. In this bank account people from all across Germany can transfer their donations for the Berlin mosque. DSD has also prepared [a very beautiful poster of the mosque](#). This poster is going to be displayed at all important events of DSD and will be sent also to different organizations. So we will be getting both publicity and donations. The estimated cost of this poster is 30 Euros. We plan to sell it for something like 50 Euros. So the money raised from this will also be going to the renovation project. There was so much demand for this poster that the small number of copies of this poster, which were free, went out of stock on the very first day. The good news for our *Jama'at* is that we have found a reliable partner which will be of great help in renovating and restoring the mosque. I am hopeful that *Insha-Allah* I will have a lot of good news to share with our brothers and sisters in our *Jama'at* in the future as a result of this cooperation.

In the end I would like to request all brothers and sisters in the *Jama'at* to join me in my prayer that Allah may bless Mr Paetz and his

team, who worked so hard for organizing this event. And then also for the people who helped from the mosque side to make this event a success. I would request all my brothers and sisters to make a formal prayer for all these people from DSD and mosque. Without them, we would not have managed this. All thanks and praise to Allah, Who has given us such a big opportunity in Germany, which I am sure is going to be a foundation stone for further work of restoration and renovation of the Berlin mosque.

Photographs from the Berlin Mosque Open Day



People waiting outside the mosque before opening ceremony

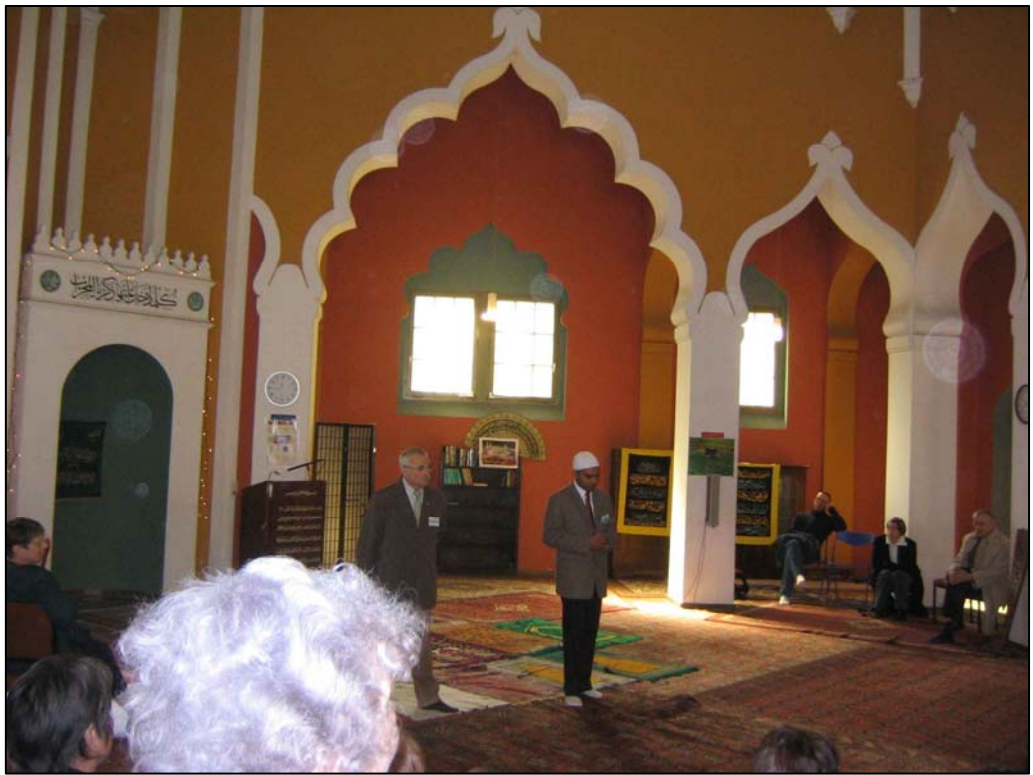
(Photographs continued on next page)



The stalls of books which contained our books and DSD brochures



Mr. Paetz after my introductory remarks, presenting book of Manfred Yahya and appealing for donations



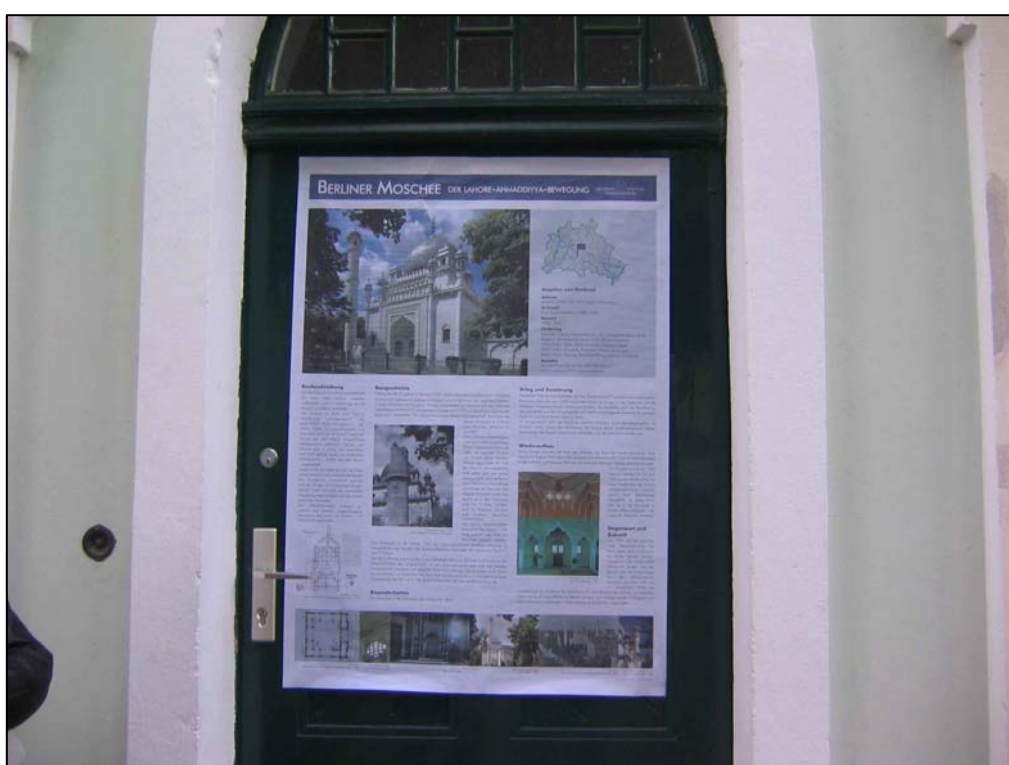
Muhammad Ali and Manfred Yahya answering questions of visitors



Mr. Paetz doing children program



A view of the audience



The poster prepared by DSD for the Berlin mosque



Mr. Paetz lying with children on floor to find the name of Allah in the mosque



People listening to Manfred Yahya outside the mosque



Mr. Paetz and Mrs. Probst from DSD with children



A view of the audience



Manfred Yahya and Muhammad Ali (AAIL), Mr. Gunther Paetz and Mrs. Anika Probst (DSD) at the end of the two days