

# A New Covenant of Virtue: Islam and Community Organising

Ruhana Ali, Lina Jamoul & Yusufi Vali

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Content Editor: Ruhana Ali  
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A New Covenant of Virtue:  
Islam and Community Organising  
by Ruhana Ali, Lina Jamoul & Yusufl Vali  
Citizens UK

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## Authors' Biographies

**Ruhana Ali** is a Citizens UK Community Organiser with over 3 years of experience training 500 leaders in the art of public action. She works as the borough Organiser in Tower Hamlets with 24 institutions. Tower Hamlets was awarded the best organised and most politically active borough in London Citizens in 2010. She is the senior Organiser for the Muslim community and teaches Islam and Organising on the Community Organising MA at Queen Mary, University of London. She co-ordinated the Citizens Iftar – the largest Muslim led public action during the 2012 Olympics attended by hundreds of leaders, athletes and politicians.

Ruhana has a BSc in Social Policy, Criminal Justice and Psychology from the London School of Economics (LSE), where she was elected as co-president of LSE Students' Union and was involved in the Living Wage campaign. She is a professional presenter on The Islam Channel, a published writer and is currently researcher on the Contending Modernities Project at Notre Dame University.

**Lina Jamoul** is the Lead Organiser of TELCO (The East London Communities Organisation) – the largest of the Citizens UK chapters and the founding member of London Citizens. Lina has 9 years' experience of Community Organising – 6 as a professional Organiser and 3 as a local leader. Lina holds a PhD from Queen Mary, University of London where she completed the first doctorate thesis on Community Organising in the UK. Lina then worked as a Community Organiser for three years in Chicago with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). She helped organise a housing campaign in Chicago, which saw an injection of \$250 million into affordable housing. Lina has trained over 1,000 local leaders in Community Organising both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Lina now coaches a team of 3 professional Community Organisers in east London.

**Yusufi Vali** has been a Community Organiser for the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate) for the last three and a half years. Among his victories include working with parents and teachers at an inner-city school in Boston to win \$40 million for renovation and working with the greater Boston Muslim community to organise the first-ever public meeting at a local mosque between the Massachusetts governor and 1,200 Muslims in May 2010.

Yusufi will soon become the new Executive Director of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Centre in Boston, MA.

Yusufi's passion for change began while working on the 2008 Obama campaign as a field organiser in Minneapolis. He is also a Marshall, a Fulbright scholar and has an MA in Islamic Studies and an MSc in Philosophy.





## Foreword

As Muslim leaders involved in Community Organising we wanted to reflect on and share how we consider our Islamic values find application in the principles and practice of Community Organising and working for the common good. We looked to the best of leaders and example for mankind, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as a guide.

The Prophet Muhammad, guided by God Almighty, transformed the whole of society and brought a new world order covering all aspects of human life: governance, war and peace, economy and society. His whole life embodied love and care for everybody in society. It is from the teachings of Islam and his experiences that we aim to highlight some aspects of his life which concern alliance and community building.

Islam teaches us to be active in our communities and to lead on issues of social justice, we wanted to share our thoughts on how Islam and Community Organising work hand in hand, allowing us to fulfil this aspect of our faith. We have seen from our own experiences as public citizens the importance and benefits of putting our faith into action and the positive impact Community Organising has on our society.

This paper is an opportunity to share our stories and our vision for how we can continue to use the lessons and teachings from Islam and practical application of Organising to build powerful communities and improve our society. The authors of the paper are professional Community Organisers and not Islamic scholars. This is our humble offering of advice for leaders interested or involved in Community Organising. With God's will, we hope that this paper will be beneficial for anybody who wants to understand the link between Islam and Community Organising and reflect on how as Muslims we can positively contribute to our communities.

Junaid Ahmed, *East London Mosque & London Citizens Trustee*  
Dr Sarfraz Jeraj, *Hyderi Islamic Centre & Chair of Lambeth Citizens*  
Dr Abdul Karim Khalil, *Director, Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre*



## Introduction

As Community Organisers who are Muslim and living in the West we have seen the challenges that Muslim communities face when considering the most effective strategy of combining the principles and values of Islam with engagement in public life. We have also seen the great positive contributions that can be made when these come together. Community Organising uses the concepts of justice, leadership, relationship building and action to work for the common good. We believe this finds synergy with the Islamic principles that were used to establish a more just society through the spread of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. These principles helped lay the foundations for Muslim engagement as active citizens.

This paper unpacks some of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him, hereafter implied) considering what strategies and tools can be used to organise the community and build a stronger, more cohesive society. Using examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad, this paper explores how his leadership involved working alongside his neighbours and fellow citizens in order to create a more just and tolerant society at a time when Muslims were a persecuted minority. The Prophet built relationships with others in the community over a common agenda, including the original Covenant of Virtue signed by the Prophet before his Prophethood. How can the model of this covenant find expression in the current context? Taking examples from Islam and highlighting case studies from our work with mosques and Islamic institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US), we explore a vision and a methodology for the future of the community.



## Muslim Communities in the West

Muslims in the West find themselves in a unique position. Many Muslims living in the UK are immigrants or are the children and grandchildren of immigrants who settled here two and a half generations ago. Their experience is similar to other immigrants who have settled in Europe and the United States. They had to find jobs, housing, good schools, build places of worship they felt comfortable and welcome in and figure out how to pass on rich cultural and religious heritages to their children born in a foreign land. In addition to these familiar pressures experienced by most immigrant families, Muslim communities in recent years have faced other specific pressures. There has been increased (and mostly unwarranted) scrutiny from government, law enforcement agencies and the media due to allegations of terrorism and extremism. Muslims, and their institutions, receive a disproportionate level of negative attention; in many cases treated as unwanted strangers. A smooth integration into Western lands still poses a real challenge.

At the same time, tremendous institutions have been built; mosques, schools and cultural centres have enriched the fabric of cities like London and Chicago. Particularly in Tower Hamlets, London and Bridgeview, south Chicago, where the Muslim community represents such a large proportion of the population.

However, in Tower Hamlets, for example, unemployment, lack of affordable housing and low wages make the borough, the third most deprived in the UK and the second poorest in London<sup>1</sup>. 45% of the population are non-white and 40% Bangladeshi: it is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the UK<sup>2</sup>. Unemployment rates are twice the London average at 13%, a quarter of borough residents have no qualifications and 40% of those residents are not in work<sup>3</sup>. In Tower Hamlets child poverty is the worst in the capital at 52% and in some wards it's as high as 70%<sup>4</sup>. The Office for National Statistics explain that rising house prices in London combined with low incomes mean that more people are migrating out of the borough than into it. This poses challenges for the settled community.

The conditions of the countries Muslims find themselves in are now their own – Muslim communities cannot be separated from the conditions of the countries they have

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1. *Local Economic Assessment Statistics 2011*

2. *Local Economic Assessment Statistics 2011*

3. *Local Economic Assessment Statistics 2011*

4. <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/london/child-poverty-in-london-the-facts/tower-hamlets-43/>

immigrated to or been born and brought up in.

What should be the response to this?

## **The Early Muslim Community**

In a number of important ways, the situation of Muslims in the West today mirrors that of the beginnings of the Muslim community in Makkah shortly after the Prophet received revelation about Islam. Even though the Prophet and most of his early followers came from established tribes of the Arabian Peninsula – as opposed to from foreign lands, like a number of Muslim communities today – they similarly experienced persecution for their Muslim identity and faith. The leaders and people of the Quraish – the ruling tribe of Makkah – would pelt the Prophet and his followers with stones and prevent them from publicly worshipping at the house of Allah, the Ka’bah<sup>5</sup>, spying and scheming against the Prophet and his fellow leaders. These conditions made it difficult for the Prophet and his followers to build their Muslim community and become integrated in the broader Makkan society, an experience familiar to many Muslims living in the West today.

At the same time, the early Muslims were no different from their fellow Makkans in their experience of the political chaos and economic injustice plaguing the Arabian Peninsula. The tribes were so divided that the law of incessant retaliation was the norm; this led to continual blood feuds and reprisals. Economic injustice reigned, usury was rampant and wealth was held in the hands of the few: largely the Quraish tribe, who controlled the holy sanctuary of the Ka’bah. If the Prophet and his followers were to build their Muslim community in this land, they could not ignore these issues but instead must work to provide answers and tackle the problems facing themselves and the broader community.

## **The Covenant of Virtue**

Some of the core values the noble Prophet Muhammad championed were justice and working together for the common good of the community – the Prophet’s strong emphasis on these principles resonated with the Makkan people.

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*5. Cube like structure in Makkah built by Abraham and his son Ishmail according to Islamic tradition as a place of worship for monotheistic religion*

Even before his Prophethood, the concept of justice in Arabian society as a whole was important to the Prophet Muhammad who worked alongside his fellow citizens campaigning to ensure that Makkah was a safe place for all to trade and live. He was present at the time of the *Hilf-ul-Fudhul* or the Covenant of Virtue that was signed by many leaders from different tribes in Makkah as a commitment to uphold justice and order in the trading city, which was presently rife with crime.

According to Salih Suruc's account, in the background to the signing of the covenant, there came a breaking point. As ibn Wail, a leading figure in the city, extorted goods from a Zabidi tribesman of Yemen. In reaction, the Zabidi tribesman knocked on the doors of many Makkans, thinking they would hear his story and come to support his just cause but, he was ignored. In a state of frustration, he climbed the Abu Qubays Mountain and called out from the top to the town people below. He shared his testimony, his story of the insults and injustice that he had faced. It was from this mountain top that he called the Quraishis to action and summoned others in the community for help. The testimony of this tribesman evoked the consciousness of some of the noblemen from the city. They immediately gathered to look for a solution to resolve the plaguing corruption and illegitimate behaviour.

The Prophet Muhammad's uncle, Zubayr, was the first leader to gather prominent figures and reputable elders to address the issue. Leading figures in the community including Hashim, Muttalib, Zuhra, Asad, Harith and the sons of Taym met in the home of Abdullah bin Jada - considered the oldest person in Makkah and one of the wealthiest and most influential of men. At this meeting, after lengthy discussions, they made an oath to each other (*Hilf* in Arabic); to set up an alliance of leaders that would uphold justice and work for the common good of Makkah.

The terms of this alliance included agreement that:

- 1. No person would be subjected to persecution, regardless of whether he/she was a native of Makkah or an outsider.*
- 2. From then on, there would be no opportunities for cruelty to occur. An oppressor's cruelty would not be overlooked and there would be no further opportunities for oppression to be inflicted.*



3. *The group would push for the rights of the downtrodden until they were obtained*

Members of the alliance promised to persevere in upholding these testaments;

*“We will persevere with our oath till the seas do not have enough water to wet a strand of hair, till the mountains are wiped away, and until the act of istilam<sup>6</sup> is removed.”*

*(Tabaqat, 1/129; Rawdu'l-Unf, 1/93)*

The *Hilf-ul-Fudhul* was established.

The alliance's first action was to take back from As bin Wail, the Zabidi tribesman's goods, which he had brought for the purpose of trade. Although Prophet Muhammad was young he joined this association and voted in favour of the covenant.

Many years later after the Covenant of Virtue had become defunct; the Prophet remarked that he would readily become party to a similar covenant in Makkah if the opportunity arose again. Certainly during his rule of the Arabian Peninsula, he tried to apply the same principles of justice prescribed in original covenant.

The background to the signing of the covenant overlaps with the some of the cultures of Community Organising. In order to deal with problems and issues facing the local community, Organising brings together relevant and powerful leaders to work for the common good. Meetings and discussions strengthen the alliance and testimony is used to impel people to act in solidarity for justice.

In Makkah when there was a clear abuse of power by the ruling tribes, it took the leadership of those oppressed and supportive of them to act. Speaking out and sharing testimony stirred the issue in the hearts of those conscious of justice. The call to action from the mountain top brought those willing to act together to plan how to tackle the issue. In that house meeting diverse and powerful leaders negotiated a deal. Out of this public commitment an alliance was formed based on mutual accountability and a

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<sup>6</sup> *The act of rubbing the black stone while circumambulating the Ka'aba. If it cannot be rubbed due to big crowds, then a gesture of greeting should be given from a distance*

promise of collective action for the benefit of the people of Makkah.

Similar patterns of working can be found in the case studies at the end of this article.

## **Justice and Working for the Common Good**

The most basic aim of the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) is to establish justice in all affairs. Justice has to flow through all levels of social life, from personal dealings with oneself and others, to public relationships with the community and state. The Quran is clear with regards to this responsibility.

*“O you, who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.”*

*(Surah An Nisa’ 4:135)*

When Islam came to the Arabian Peninsula and spread beyond, it did so to address the power imbalance, racism and inequality prevalent in society. Islam teaches that the only superiority people have over each other is their level of God-consciousness and piety – not their race, class or status.

*“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted”*

*(Surah Al Hujurat 49:13)*

The Prophet Muhammad followed the traditions of the Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them) that came before him. In the face of serious persecution he spoke out against injustice, a radical message which he used to unite society on this common thread. Today, speaking out against injustice and working for the common good continues to prove a challenging task.

What did the Prophet do in these circumstances? How can this shed light into what our response should be to today's situations?

## **Building Relationships**

One of the key steps that the Prophet took to strengthen his nascent and persecuted community was to focus on relationship building. In a sense, his focus on relationship building first began in the Cave of Hira, a place the Prophet would often visit in private to deepen and strengthen his relationship with Allah (God). It was when the Prophet's relationship was strong enough with Allah that Allah entrusted him with the powerful message of Islam, which would change, and continues to change, the Arabian Peninsula and indeed the world.

When he received his first revelations from Allah calling him to spread the message of Islam he held one-to-one conversations with his trusted family members and friends to gain their advice and support. His first conversation was with his wife, Khadijah. These one-to-one conversations were crucial in both beginning the building of his core following and in getting to know the people in his community. As a result when it came to the task of spreading the message he was able to identify relevant talent. He matched the strengths and weaknesses of his followers and companions successfully, delegating and appointing roles based on individual skill sets. An example of this was appointing Ja'far ibn Abi Talib to lead the first Muslim migration to Abyssinia.

The Prophet saw this model of relationship building as key to protecting and growing his Muslim community. Shortly after he began publicly espousing the message, the Quraish leaders began beating and even killing his fellow believers. They would not attack the Prophet directly because he belonged to the Quraish and was protected by his powerful and loving uncle. The Prophet knew that some of the tribal chiefs opposed his message simply out of ignorance, so he organised at least two meals in the early years with the tribal chiefs, so they could know his message and him. The second meal indeed led to some members of his clan, at least secretly, accepting his message and abandoning their opposition to the new faith.

The Prophet not only practiced relationship building within Makkah, but encouraged it beyond the familiar confines of the Makkkan community. There is a classic example in the story of Negus, the Christian King of Abyssinia. Due to the immense persecution of

Muslims in Makkah, the Prophet sent Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, his cousin, and a group of fellow Muslims to meet and find safety with Negus. When King Negus saw the sincerity of these Muslims and the similarity in the messages of Christianity and Islam, he gave refuge to Ja'far and his fellow Muslims, who then lived in Abyssinia for nearly 15 years. King Negus would continue to be an important ally for the Prophet until the King's death. The story highlights the value and importance of relationship building with peer leaders in times of success and challenge and is an example of how solidarity and working for justice can be achieved in alliance.

Perhaps the most successful instance of the Prophet's use of relationship building to strengthen and to grow the Muslim community's power is the story of his dealings with leaders of the 'Aws and Khazraj tribes. The 'Aws and Khazraj were two tribes from another town, Yathrib (later Medina). The leaders of these tribes heard of the Prophet's message from afar and wanted to learn more. So when they came for the yearly holy pilgrimage to Makkah they sought a meeting with the Prophet. The Prophet met them, got to know them and shared the Quranic message. After two years of meetings and building relationships with the leaders of these two tribes (generally after the pilgrimage), the tribes were so impressed with the Prophet and the message that they invited him to become the ruler of Yathrib and arbitrate among the different tribes. The Prophet accepted this invitation; this ultimately led to the migration of the Muslim community. The security this migration gave the community allowed for the growth in power needed to tackle the problems facing the wider Arabian Peninsula.

As the Prophet's example suggests, while it may be more comfortable for Muslims today to be insular, concentrating on working within their ethnic communities, this will have little or even a negative impact in the long run. Remaining insular is not effective in tackling the discrimination that many in Muslim communities face; being insular is to become irrelevant. Thus, if the desire is to be relevant, Muslim communities need to lead and participate in positive change in their societies. Muslim communities need to work together, deliberately and consistently finding allies and building relationships within its diverse communities and beyond; no community is as strong individually as it is in a collective. Community Organising enables this alliance building based on values of justice and seeking to work for the common good.

The Quran states the importance cooperation and relationship building through action for the common good.

*“And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression”.*

*(Surah Al Maidah 5:2)*

## **Leadership Development**

Leadership development was an important focus of the Prophet’s life as he sought to build the Muslim community’s capacity and power.

Leadership is strongly encouraged in Islam, the Prophet instructed that even when there is a group of three people travelling on a journey somebody should be appointed the *Amir* (leader) to avoid disputes and ensure guidance.

Examples of this abound – from allowing others to lead in prayers, to assigning leaders for numerous expeditions, to consulting his fellow leaders in community decisions, as he did before the Battle of Uhud<sup>7</sup>. This trust and investment in the leadership of the Companions – such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali and the family of the Prophet (May God be pleased with all of them) – was the reason that the Islamic State continued to exist and rule using the Prophet’s message of Islam and justice well after his death.

Conversely today, in our experience of developing teams and working with Muslim institutions, the work in Islamic centres is often left to a small, tiring group of volunteers. In order to build effective, public relationships with others the community needs to be effective internally; our Islamic institutions need to be strong. The effectiveness of the community is greatly diminished if the work is left to one charismatic leader or the same, old group of leaders. Leadership development as a priority for mosques means investment in staff and volunteers; it means identifying them, recruiting them, meeting their interests, training them and supporting them in becoming effective leaders. Community Organising provides a model for leadership and talent development within institutions. In our experience, strong leaders are focused on scouting and developing others in their organisation, so responsibility is shared and work can continue in the future. Community Organising values institutions, recognising them as the foundation

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<sup>7</sup> *The Battle of Uhud occurred in 625 A.D (3.H) was the second battle in Islam history between Medinan Muslims and the invading Makkkan Army. The Prophet sought advice from his companions on strategies during the battle.*

for civil society and works to build their internal power and their relevance in their surrounding communities. The development of leaders is integral to this.

## **Pro-Active Action**

Considering the persecution the early Muslims faced, one may have expected the Prophet to devote his energies simply to defending the Muslim community. Instead, the early life of the Prophet is replete with examples of him and his companions planning and taking action to build a society more consistent with the vision of Islam. For example, when the Prophet and his followers migrated to Medina<sup>8</sup>, they could have been content with finally having freedom to practice their religion. Instead, we see that upon his arrival the Prophet drafted a constitution to justly regulate relations among the various tribes, thus moving the Medinan society away from the previous norm of political chaos and retaliation. Even while they were a minority community and still castigated in the wider, hostile Arabian Peninsula, early Muslims engaged in crafting their own agenda and taking pro-active action towards improving the conditions of the broader society. This ultimately would be one of the reasons for their powerful influence in the region.

In the Quran, the importance of agency is clear and the following verse puts the onus on individuals to be pro-active in changing the circumstance they find themselves in before they can expect any help from Allah, just as the early Muslims did.

*“Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves”.*

*(Surah Ar Ra’d 13:11)*

The verse also encourages us to be involved in public action, as the above example of the Prophet’s life illustrates, Islam is a pragmatic religion encouraging individuals to be involved in their communities and society.

Too often today we find the Muslim community reacting to the agendas of others, responding to the government, the police or the local council. So often out on demonstrations about issues in the Middle East. While these are important affairs and our concern is not misplaced there needs to be a greater focus and consideration of the

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<sup>8</sup> Yathrib’s name was changed to Medina when the Prophet Muhammad migrated there

priorities of Muslims living in the West today. It is rare to see groups initiate, craft and pursue their own public agenda - as the Prophet and the early Companions did. Community Organising gives us the opportunity to work on issues that affect the lives of ordinary people living in the local community. By setting our own agenda we are able to prioritise the important issues that we want to work on first before asking others how they can work with us. This initiation and crafting ensures that motivation and energy is based on our interests and issues, not the agendas of others.

## Vision - The Next Twenty Years

Community Organising represents an opportunity for Muslim communities to put the principles of justice into action and engage in public life for the common good. When communities are able to work together towards common goals their values are brought into the public sphere in a positive way - a way that counters the pressures often faced by Muslim communities in Britain and the U.S. Working to make positive change in society is arguably the best form of service (*khidma*) to others and invitation (*da'wa*) to the peaceful message of Islam. An alliance of institutions working to uphold justice today is synonymous with the original Covenant of Virtue signed and upheld by the Prophet after the foundation of Islam.

Our vision is to see more mosques joining broad-based alliances, building generational relationships with key allies; more Islamic institutions adopting leadership development as central to the work they do; a broader, more ambitious public strategy to impact upon the conditions affecting local communities.

The following case studies and reflections from Muslim leaders involved in Community Organising highlight the practical difference being Organised can make.

The Prophet Muhammad and his companions used the above three strategies - with Allah's aid - to build strong, powerful and just Muslim communities. Within twenty-three years, the community rose from being in a position of being victimised and asking for help, to helping others and establishing a fair society. The aim and challenge of Muslim communities today must be to learn lessons from and emulate the work of the Prophet and early Muslims - seeking real change in the communities they live in. Muslim communities must change their standing in Western societies, taking the lead in working with others and pursuing the creation of the more just and tolerant world humankind is striving for.





## Case Studies

### Building a Stronger Team Through One-To-Ones

*Rugena Ali,*

*Youth Co-ordinator, Muslimaath UK*

Muslimaath UK is a community based women's organisation, working primarily in east London that seeks to encourage Muslim women to be active and bring about positive change in their communities. Our organisation has several active wings including our sisters' knowledge circles and an enthusiastic youth team that works with schools, holds events and fundraises for charity.

As part of our TELCO (The East London Communities Organisation) membership we have had training and held a listening campaign throughout our organisation. This helped us find new interests and identify new leaders and therefore develop the talent in our organisation, so the same old faces were not being drained through over work.

#### Training

One Saturday afternoon in the mosque, a team of 30 women were trained by our TELCO Organiser, Ruhana Ali, on the importance of building our relational power through a process known as the one-to-one conversation. At first I didn't see the difference between this conversation and what most of us were doing anyway until the issue of identifying the other person's self-interest was elaborated. Seeing the one-to-one conversations take place in front of us and understanding the structure and types of questions that you can ask, to get to the heart of what motivates an individual, was an important lesson and I was itching to get started. We learnt that through one-to-ones you are aiming to build public relationships; relationships that are accountable based on working together and different to friendships. Through the one-to-one if you can identify self-interest - a person's motivation - you are able to be more effective in getting them to act as they will be working on issues they care about. At the end of the training we all made a commitment; some more enthusiastically than others, to hold between 8 and 10 one-to-one conversations, starting with the members in our own organisation in the next month.

## Impact

I began carrying out my one-to-one conversations in December, and although I initially started because of my quota given to TELCO, I soon found that they were really helpful in strengthening my team. They became an opportunity for the newly formed youth branch of Muslimate UK to find out which direction we needed to move towards. Through a series of one-to-ones internally with our members and externally with potential partners and community workers, our team were able to find out how members felt about the organisation, decide on new campaigns to run, get fresh ideas for upcoming events and identify potential collaborations in our community.

Most importantly, I found that it was the best way to assess the needs of our members and identify our own interests as a team. Through sitting down and taking the time out to talk to our members for forty minutes or so, we were able to find development opportunities for each young person, if not in the organisation then outside the organisation. It was also an opportunity for me to identify those who were not ready for leadership, which was vital for retention. Too often we are quick to put someone in charge of an event when in reality they are just not ready. It leads them to feel like the organisation isn't for them or that their role is too stressful. By identifying this earlier on, we were able to give them the space they needed and to provide adequate training until they were ready. This has really strengthened our team.

## On-Going Commitment

We have continued to do one-to-ones as a team; this really took off after our first leadership camp. Finding the time to do them is hard in a busy diary, but for me they are the perfect follow up after a really productive week. As well as one-to-ones with me, each participant also had a follow up with one of our trainers within the first 3 months. This helped keep young people engaged and kept us up to date with their issues. A commitment that started out with a modest 8 one-to-ones from me has in 4 months led to 35 internal and 5 external one-to-ones and counting.

## **A Personal Reflection on Training**

*Sumer Mehmet*

*Head teacher, Young Muslim Academy at Lewisham Islamic Centre*

My name is Sumer Mehmet; I am the head teacher of the Young Muslim Academy a supplementary school based in the Lewisham Islamic Centre. I have been involved with South London Citizens for almost a year now. I have attended both two day and six day training courses with Citizens UK and can wholeheartedly say that the tools I have gained have been instrumental in improving the quality of our organisation.

I found the training so useful that we arranged for a Community Organiser to design a training course specifically for our Islamic centre which the management committee and active leaders from both the brothers and sisters side of the organisation attended. We have taken a commitment to hold one-to-one conversations and hold a listening campaign within our organisation, to get to know our community better.

In a brief conversation with my Community Organiser, Derron Wallace last week, I was sharing my thoughts on the way in which one-to-one meetings has transformed our organisation. He made a comment which aptly sums up my thoughts: 'the one-to-one is so simple yet effective that it's practically radical.' I would fundamentally agree with this position.

In a society where we are increasingly cut off from each other, forging relationships and making our organisations more relational should be very high on the list of our priorities. Stronger relationships, both internal and external, have put our organisation, Lewisham Islamic Centre, in a dramatically stronger position than six months ago. From all angles, stronger relationships have led to revolutionary results for our service users and for our organisation's power base across the borough.



## **Taking Public Action on Mixed Gender Hospital Wards**

*Sarfraz Jeraj,*

*Borough Co-Chair, South London Citizens*

Hyderi Islamic Centre is a local Muslim community centre and a UK registered charity in Streatham, south London. The congregation is predominantly made up of Khoja Shia Ithnasheri Muslims, of Indian descent, that live in and around the area. Our centre has been in membership of South London Citizens for over four years.

### **Identifying an Issue**

The dignity of our community's members has been paramount to our identity. So it was with great sadness that some members of our community came forward with their experiences of being admitted as inpatients to local hospitals and finding out that their wards were mixed sex. This made the mothers and sisters in our community in particular very distressed as they could not freely change their clothes, take off their scarves and relax in hospital clothing in the presence of the opposite gender. Although individual complaints had been submitted, little resolution was in sight. As a single community with individual, sporadic complaints we did not have enough power to change things. We decided to take action and raise this issue at a South London Citizens (SLC) meeting and share testimony on how this was affecting our community. At that meeting we found that similar experiences were shared by members of other communities who were also concerned by mixed sex wards at the hospitals. The meeting arrived at a consensus; this was an issue that we had to stand together on.

### **Research, Action, Evaluation**

Through South London Citizens we initiated an action research campaign involving volunteer members from different communities. We went to hospital wards and gathered data on the proportion of mixed sex wards. The SLC Organisers collated this data and combined it with research into hospital policy and relevant legislation.

As a community alliance we called a meeting with senior management teams at different hospitals. We presented them with the results of our research which found these hospitals were in breach of their own policies on single sex wards. This amounted to sufficient pressure to agree real commitments and time lines for the implementation of

separate wards for genders. To ensure accountability we held several meetings with hospital management following up this implementation. We had achieved our goal together!

Our success in resolving this issue was only possible because we joined forces with other institutions. Working together made our cause more powerful, engendered more ideas about how to resolve the issue, allowed access to greater resources and provided organisation support to facilitate our goals. The experience helped to build trust and relationships with other communities and motivated us to support the work of other issues that affect Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Our community has since taken an active role in London Citizens allowing us to be pro-active and to increase the profile of Muslims in action for social justice, a fundamental tenant of Islam.

## **From Public Marginalisation to Public Recognition: The Importance of Relationships – Part 1**

*Yusufi Vali*

*Community Organiser, Industrial Areas Foundation, USA*

In the span of the last 10 years, the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC), the biggest Muslim institution in New England, went from being one of the most publicly maligned institutions in Boston to a recognised part of the city's religious and political landscape. A key factor that led to the shift was the centre's adoption of a Community Organising approach in engaging religious and political actors.

### **Effective Leadership**

Shortly after 9/11, the ISBCC, like several Muslim institutions under construction across the United States, came under attack by extreme, right-wing groups. These groups devised a media campaign intentionally trying to link the Islamic Society of Boston – the organisation building the ISBCC – to terrorism. The campaign proved successful, leading to a cloud of suspicion hanging over the ISBCC and indeed the wider Muslim community in Boston. By 2005, the centre's construction appeared to be in jeopardy. With their public standing damaged the Islamic Society of Boston requested a new Muslim organisation, the Muslim American Society of Boston (MAS Boston), to officially take over the management of the ISBCC project and to re-build financial and community support for it. MAS Boston's leadership was comprised largely of younger, more professionally oriented people, many of whom had previously worked in private industry. They quickly recognised the need to build allies outside of the Muslim community, particularly in the interfaith community, as a way to marginalise opposition to the building of the centre. Alongside this they recognised the need to build support within the Muslim community for the project and re-start construction.

MAS Boston immediately reached out to a number of interfaith organisations, among them the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), a local Community Organising network of faith-based institutions. (GBIO is in turn part of a larger international Community Organising network, the Industrial Areas Foundation.) The leaders of MAS Boston had heard that GBIO had a degree of political clout in the city.

In their first meeting with GBIO leaders, the MAS Boston leadership came away



completely surprised and engaged. GBIO's set of interfaith leaders were political thinkers and actors, who were strategic, organised and won - exactly what MAS Boston needed to do to re-build support for the centre. MAS Boston committed itself to engaging and learning from GBIO. GBIO also had self-interest - GBIO wanted to build a deeper base of congregations in the inner city of Boston. The centre, if built, would have a diverse base of congregants, from African-Americans, to Arabs, to Somalis, to white Americans, to South Asians in the inner-city.

MAS Boston immediately became a member of GBIO and appointed Mr Bilal Kaleem, a 28 year old, Nigerian-South-Asian and former MIT graduate, to the board of GBIO. Using the Organising tool of a one-on-one relational meeting, Bilal began building relationships with all the top board members and key Rabbis and Ministers in GBIO. He and other MAS Boston leaders also started acting with these leaders on issues of justice. For example, GBIO leaders and Bilal held several meetings with the Massachusetts governor and legislatures to fight for universal health care. In these meetings, they had to work as a team, use each other's strengths and help each other overcome their weaknesses, if they were to succeed. They also had to rely and depend on one another, particularly around negotiating turnout when it came to executing mass public meetings intended to put pressure on public officials around health care. Through the one-to-one's and the collective actions, a special sense of camaraderie and trust developed between GBIO leaders and MAS Boston's leaders.

By 2008 the relationship between the MAS Boston and GBIO had become strong and mutually beneficial. Because of Bilal, who was now the Executive Director of MAS Boston, Rabbis and Reverends became key allies of the centre and helped to keep any extremist opponents of the centre at bay. Construction of the centre picked up. GBIO, meanwhile, had a real footing in a congregation in the inner-city; with Bilal turning out nearly 150 people of diverse backgrounds to one public meeting.

In 2009 the ISBCC officially completed Phase 1 of its construction and was poised to become a recognised part of Boston's religious and political landscape. It was largely because of MAS Boston's investment in Community Organising that the centre had become a reality.

## **From Public Marginalisation to Public Recognition: The Action is in the Reaction - Part II**

*Yusufi Vali*

*Community Organiser, Industrial Areas Foundation US*

Although MAS Boston had come a long way in building community support for the ISBCC and was proud of Phase 1's completion, some public actors were still concerned about the political consequences of a public visit to the centre. At the 2009 inauguration of the mosque, for example, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick cancelled his visit at the last second. Most mainstream Rabbis, while privately supportive of the centre, could not make a public visit due to the reaction they could face in their congregations. Additionally, extremist groups continued to release "new information" regarding the centre's "links" to terrorism. While much better than in 2006, the public standing of the centre and the Muslim community of Boston still remained under some suspicion.

2010 was an election year for Governor Patrick. Because he had been struggling in the polls, his campaign shifted strategies and re-focused on building his base in the communities of colour, which had been a stronghold for him four years earlier. As part of that strategy, in February 2010 the governor called MAS Boston's Executive Director Bilal Kaleem, whom he had met through GBIO's Organising work, for "a tour and visit with the community" to the centre.

### **An Opportunity for Action**

Having experienced the power of GBIO's Organising methods, Bilal decided to turn the governor's request on its head. Instead of the governor coming to the centre for the usual political stump speech in front of 200 - 300 community members, Bilal and the MAS leadership proposed that the governor come to an action, where MAS Boston would turn out over 1,000 Muslims from across the state and the Muslim community would make specific and concrete requests of the governor around issues of concern facing the community. The governor agreed and the date of 22nd May 2010 was set.

### **Listening Campaign**

From late February until early May 2010, a team of Muslim leaders from MAS Boston organised community meetings at nearly all the major Muslim institutions in the greater

Boston area to better understand the issues facing their community. The meetings reached over 500 Muslims and a common theme emerged. Muslims, young and old, felt invisible, discriminated and maligned in the Massachusetts public sphere. Most government dignitaries, they rightly felt, feared coming to their institutions because of the charges of terrorism instigated by extremist organisations. The only public officials that regularly visited (and spied on) their institutions were the wrong ones, such as the FBI.

Four major requests for the governor emerged from the community listening campaign.

- 1. To visit 2 additional mosques in the next year*
- 2. The governor to publicly urge law enforcement officials to undergo cultural sensitivity trainings and stop profiling Muslims*
- 3. Have his Secretary of Education formulate a strategy with Muslim leaders to better train teachers to address discrimination that young Muslim children face in public schools*
- 4. Be an ally of the GBIO, which MAS Boston was part of, on our anti-usury campaign to cap interest rates that were negatively impacting all Americans*

These requests formed the agenda of the action.

### **Organised People**

On 22nd May 2010, the governor arrived at the centre. Over 1,200 Muslims from 25 Muslim institutions from across greater Boston welcomed him. The crowd was highly diverse with people from a myriad backgrounds including Sudanese, South Asian, Somali, African-American, Moroccan, Egyptian, Iraqi, white-American, Palestinian and many more. After Bilal gave the opening address, one by one Muslim leaders told stories of discrimination and pain they had experienced in the public sphere. The four major requests were made, and the governor said “yes” to each request. The governor then concluded with his own address to the community, where he empathised with their pain of discrimination, being an African-American himself.

The community was elated. The next day in the Boston Globe, the headline read, “Yours is a peaceful faith”, quoting the governor. The governor’s visit appeared to send a clear message to the political establishment: there is no reason to fear working with Muslims’.

## The Action is in the Reaction

On Thursday 27th May, five days later, the Independent Candidate running for governor and then State Treasurer, Timothy Cahill, released a statement to the press, characterising the governor's visit to the ISBCC as "playing politics with terrorism". It was a cheap attack on the governor and Muslim community, intended to pander to certain conservative voters in the state.

In the Muslim community, the feeling of euphoria after the governor's visit quickly turned into a feeling of fear and pain. Some began to wonder if the action with the governor should have been done at all, given how the community was now being used as a "political football."

Bilal and the MAS Boston leadership immediately got on the phone with their allies in GBIO: Reverend Hurmon Hamilton, a powerful African-American minister in Boston and President of GBIO; Rabbi Jonah Pesner, an influential leader in Reform Judaism and Organisers Cheri Andes and myself, to devise a response to Cahill's comments. On the surface, responding to Cahill's attack was a complicated matter for GBIO. In 2009, Cahill, as the State Treasurer, had moved nearly \$241 million of state monies out of Bank of America, due to pressure from GBIO's constituents, as a sign of protest against the bank's high interest rates. Additionally, in April 2010 Cahill, as the chair of a state school building authority, had also committed to funding a major renovation of a GBIO school, a \$40 - 60 million project. Would GBIO aid MAS Boston in responding?

As soon as the call started, Rev. Hamilton stated that Cahill's attack must receive a response from GBIO for the following reasons. First, by Cahill attacking MAS Boston, he, Rev. Hamilton contended, had attacked one of GBIO's members. GBIO could not let that pass. Second, Rev. Hamilton argued, if Cahill's use of these kind of politics of opportunism and fear were to go unanswered, it would portend an ominous future for Massachusetts political life. It would send the message to other political leaders that the use of that kind of destructive politics was tolerable.

Straight after the call ended, Rev. Hamilton called Cahill and asked him to meet a group of religious leaders at 9 am the next morning, Friday 28th May, in the basement of his church, Roxbury Presbyterian. Cahill, who had enjoyed a close relationship with Rev. Hamilton, agreed. Bilal and Rev. Hamilton, then each called some of the most powerful

Ministers, Rabbis and Imams in Boston to meet with Cahill next morning.

Cahill entered a room filled with over 20 faith leaders. Each noted their disappointment and told stories of how their own communities had at times been victims of the kind of bigotry Cahill had employed. The Rabbis told stories of how their grandparents had lived in fear in America because of the stereotyping of Jews. The African-American ministers noted how their community had been a target of racial prejudice throughout American history. The Catholic priests recalled the prejudice they faced during President Kennedy's run. And the Muslim leaders expressed their own pain and shock at Cahill's statement. The religious leaders demanded that Cahill retract his bigoted statement. But, even though Cahill's seemed visibly affected (his hands were shaking), he said that he was not prepared to make that retraction.

### **The Enemy is Your Best Organiser**

In response, religious leaders and MAS Boston decided to hold a press conference right after Friday prayers at the ISBCC later that day. Two hundred Muslims streamed out from their prayers and two hundred interfaith leaders stood with them in solidarity. One by one, Bilal, Rev. Hamilton, Rabbis who would have never set foot in front of the ISBCC before and other faith leaders decried Cahill's politics of fear. Major media stations and newspapers covered the press conference.

The next day, the Boston Globe's headline read, "Religious leaders blast Cahill." When the Republican candidate running for governor was asked about the governor's visit, he said that he saw nothing wrong with it. Cahill, meanwhile, went silent on the issue. The public standing of the Muslim community as well as the health of Massachusetts politics had been protected.

A year and a half later, MAS Boston and GBIO held another action at the ISBCC, this time with candidates for Boston's city council on education, youth jobs, immigration and small business issues. No political leaders attacked the candidates for coming to the centre. After ten years of strife, the ISBCC finally had become an everyday part of the Boston religious and political landscape. MAS Boston's adoption of Community Organising techniques was a major reason for a positive shift in the Muslim community's public standing.

## **Making Our Streets Safer Together**

*Nurul Ullah*

*Project Officer, Da'watul Islam UK & Eire*

Da'watul Islam UK & Eire is a national community-faith organisation and a registered charity in the UK. Since their inception in 1979, Da'watul Islam have been working primarily with the Bangladeshi community in centres and branches across the UK – including Dar ul Ummah in the Shadwell neighbourhood. We recognise the importance of community safety and crime reduction initiatives and believe that such work forms part of the articles of the Islamic Faith. So we have invested much time and resources over the years in seeking to address the issue of community safety. Dar ul Ummah and Jamiutul Ummah is a community mosque and boys Islamic secondary school based in Tower Hamlets and a member of TELCO. The area in which the school is located is not far from many of the drug dealing and gang hotspots in the neighbourhood. Leaders have been keen to work more with their neighbours to tackle some of the problems of safety on the streets and are involved in the CitySafe campaign.

### **CitySafe Zone**

The idea of CitySafe is to make our communities safer by ensuring we look out for each other by building better relationships with all who live in our neighbourhood. It's practical application, identifying places of safety (Havens) where vulnerable people in our community can visit if they feel unsafe or are in danger, with those places committing to report 100% of crime and to offer refuge. The fear that young people experience on our local streets makes these places particularly important – providing shelter to those who need it. These CitySafe Havens are clearly identified with stickers on their door.

Since we became a member of TELCO, as an organisation we have energetically participated in the CitySafe project. In particular, we have made our own building in Shadwell a Safe Haven and worked closely with our neighbouring church, St Paul's, to make our local area, Watney Market, the first CitySafe Zone<sup>9</sup> in our borough. This involved building relationships with local businesses, shops and community institutions in Shadwell and registering them to be Safe Havens. The work is on-going and we talk

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*9. An area or street in which there are shops or institutions that commit to 100% reporting of crime to the Police and making their buildings Safe Havens*

regularly with our local shopkeepers to find out about any incidents that have taken place. The CitySafe charter<sup>10</sup> and our commitment to keeping our community safe holds similarities with the *Hilf ul Fudhul* Covenant signed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Makkah.

### **Neighbourhood Safety Walk**

Even when Safe Havens have been established, work continues; this is not the end of the story. In order to build deeper and stronger community relationships we needed a bigger team to be involved in this work. A carefully planned community walk by myself and minister in training Jude Padfield at St Paul's, with the help of our Community Organiser was a way to involve the wider community. We wanted to walk the streets of our neighbourhood with key local leaders representing several church groups and mosques in Tower Hamlets to identify community safety issues, drugs misuse and to build better relationships in our often segregated community.

Nearly 50 leaders including Imams, church leaders, local residents and teachers from local schools gathered outside our centre, Dar ul Ummah. Together, we walked as a unified group through our local Watney Market and spoke to local businesses about CitySafe. We then went to examine a dilapidated building that was being used as the local 'crack house' by drug users, gangs and the homeless which had been a serious cause of concern for all of us. The house got broken into every week and while the boards went up the shards of glass from the windows hung on by a shoestring, slowly falling to the pavement. It was in the interests of the whole community to approach the local council to sort this out and to try and pin down the landlord responsible for the upkeep of the building. We also visited the neighbouring park, where our young children play on a muddy patch of earth, surrounded by broken glass bottles. Taking our people out on a public action to think and reflect about the state of our neighbourhood and the safety hazards in our community was an important first step in confronting the reality of the area we live in. As we walked back to St Paul's church for a critical evaluation we developed a plan of action for the issues we saw on the walk. We are now pursuing these issues with the local council to get the playing field turfed with grass and a compulsory purchase order for the derelict property.

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*10. A charter signed up to by leaders, businesses and the community to commit to reporting crime and working together to make the community safe*

## Reflection

The neighbourhood walk had a significant positive impact in the local community and the wider borough. I feel it was one of the most effective initiatives which demonstrated publicly that different faith communities are united in achieving a common goal and share the same hopes and fears about safety in the area. On the day of the walk I noticed a lot of attention from local people who were curious to see a large mix of men, women and children from different races and faiths, all walking and talking to each other, happily and united. We can't underestimate the importance of different community leaders taking action together and sharing their hopes and fears. This is something we don't do enough of in our neighbourhood and it was an experience that really took people outside of their comfort zone. For me this event was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. I passionately believe that more public action like this on a regular basis will make our great city a truly safe place for all, a CitySafe and a new Covenant of Virtue for us inshaAllah.





## **A Community Centre for All**

*By Dilowar Khan,*

*Director, East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre*

The East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre based in Whitechapel are founding members of London Citizens. The mosque celebrated its centennial anniversary in 2010 and is among the largest in the capital with over 5,000 worshippers regularly attending congregational prayers on Friday. The extension to the mosque, the London Muslim Centre, first opened on the 11th June 2004 after a campaign for the land. The centre is home to a secondary school in the form of London East Academy, in addition to employment and training projects to facilitate community development.

Back in 1996, when we were first approached by Neil Jameson to become members of this new broad-based power alliance starting up in east London I thought great, in time we will soon give him Da'wah and convert our Organiser into our way of thinking. Now almost 20 years on and still involved in TELCO, I laugh when I think he has done a better job of converting us to broad-based Organising and TELCO than we did with him.

One of our earliest campaigns and one of the most important in our experience as an institution involved in an alliance was the collective struggle we faced to acquire the land where our London Muslim Centre now stands. The need for more space and an extension became increasingly urgent as our communities kept growing. In 1998, an opportunity arose to acquire the land next to our mosque, the car park which was formerly a World War 2 bomb site. We discovered that a private property developer wanted to build high rise private apartments on the space for commercial gain. Many of our non-Muslim colleagues through TELCO knew the importance of this space for the growth and development of our community and institution. They stood shoulder to shoulder with us and helped campaign to acquire the land through creative actions to show their support.

### **Support for Planning Permission**

One Friday after Jummuah prayers, we organised ourselves as a community with hundreds of people to form a giant human ring surrounding the mosque complex and the car park where we wanted the land. Through TELCO we had men, women and children of all faiths and none, show solidarity by standing with us to support our bid

for the space and the local media covered the story to put pressure on the property developer. We managed to persuade the property developer not to build in our community and to sell the property to the mosque. After we persuaded the developer, we still needed the planning permission from the local council to allow us to build on the land. Again through TELCO, we took action to ensure the council understood the full extent of the need for this space in our community. A team of leaders including a Catholic Priest and religious sister chained themselves with a few of us from the mosque to the planning department at the council to highlight the significance of this issue. The action was designed to get recognition and a relationship with council to discuss this issue. We managed to get a positive reaction from the council and permission to build our centre. We could not have done this as effectively alone. The fact that diverse groups were organised as one community all saying “we need this land for our community”, was the most radical persuasion you could have asked for. The actions showed the unity, strength and power of public relationships in our communities. This is what relating to each other, trusting each other and working with each other can achieve. On the 8th March 1998, a large, peaceful procession moved through east London to support our goal.

Once the land was made available, the local community showed its generosity and enthusiasm by rallying to raise £600,000 in order to purchase it. On the 27th November 1999 after just 3 months and from donations by the community alone there was great jubilation as a cheque for this amount was handed to the Mayor of Tower Hamlets. After a long campaign to secure the land, a comprehensive extension began, which has brought additional prayer space and a wide range of much needed community services, such as a health and fitness centre, education facilities and training projects to the community.

### **Our Current Situation**

Ten years on, our centre is used by all in the community for conferences, weddings, courses, public meetings and training. Last year, we even held BBC Radio 4 programme “Any Questions” at our centre a few weeks after the mosque was attacked in the media accused of having links to extremism. This kind of proactive action and the relationships we have built in the community through years of working together mean that we are more resilient to criticisms and Islamophobic attacks on our mosque. However, we cannot take for granted the importance of these relationships and the need to work at

them through the sunshine and the storms. Our community has continued to expand and grow and we are now in the process of our second development, the Maryam Centre. This new development is a six storey, state of the art of centre predominantly catering for the services of the women in our community. Due to strong relationships we have the support of our community to develop these services. Our relationship with TELCO has been invaluable in this journey and we encourage all other mosques and Islamic institutions to be involved in broad-based Organising, building powerful alliances in our community for the common good.



## **The Importance of Good Governance**

*Neil Jameson*

*Executive Director & Lead Organiser, Citizens UK and London Citizens*

The aims and objectives of Citizens UK and London Citizens, agreed with the UK Charity Commission, are the same for both organisations. They are to “encourage and support the people of the United Kingdom and London to participate in public life” and “to strengthen their institutions in the process”. So we are bound in by both UK charity and company law to encourage “participation in public or civic life”, obliged to work primarily with civil society and the civic institutions owned and respected by ‘the people’. We use another word for “participation in public life”: governance. Citizens core objective is for our members to play a part in influencing and shaping the decisions that affect our families and neighbourhoods.

### **Reviving Public Assembly**

Over the last fifteen years Citizens UK has revived the tradition of public assembly as one of the best ways of keeping politics alive (and not just in the TV studio), these involve thousands of our members and effect both policy and public relationships. Practically, for all of our member communities this means building a different and diverse leadership team for each assembly and ensuring a healthy turn out of groups of people from their institution to fill the various halls and meeting places where such assemblies are held. This alongside participating in regular listening campaigns prior to the assembly where the issues to be discussed and proposals to be made are agreed and voted on. Opportunities for ‘consultation’ or listening are substantial in faith communities and where better than in the mosque, particularly on Friday’s Jumuah prayer when both the sermon and the notices afterwards might relate to a social justice issue or a campaign that Citizens is dealing with at the time.

### **Collective Leadership**

With each assembly a collective leadership team is appointed to both co-chair and oversee the build-up to the action. The assembly often starts with a reflection – this can be a relevant reading from the Bible or Quran; opportunities for prayer are scheduled into the assembly script and there is always at least one experienced Muslim leader in the collective. For instance on 3rd May 2010, Citizens UK held the largest event of the

General Election campaign with 2,500 people packing into Central Hall Westminster to hear the three main party leaders (David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown) respond to what we billed as The Peoples Agenda: 2010.

Kaneez Shaid, Marketing Manager from Sir George Monoux College, co-chaired the section with David Cameron, where he was pressed to give clear answers to our specific questions. She did this brilliantly – firm, polite and fair, a great role model for many women attending the assembly.

Similarly in November 2011, TELCO celebrated our 15th Anniversary at The Troxy, Limehouse. Over 2,000 people attended and a collective of leaders filled the stage, including some of the early founders like Dilowar Khan, Director of the East London Mosque and Siraj Salekin from Stepney Green School who co-chaired TELCO's Founding Assembly in York Hall, Bethnal Green in 1996. The London Olympics were the theme for the evening and we were privileged to have both the CEO (Paul Deighton) and the Chair (Lord Seb Coe) of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) present to be politely held accountable and thanked for sustaining our 8 year working relationship and making London the first Living Wage Olympics. The mixed team of co-chairs, who more than rose to this challenging task, included a Catholic Priest; a Salvation Army Captain; a local Anglican Church Warden and Arman Ali from Da'watul Islam UK & Eire. About a quarter of the people in the assembly were from TELCO's Muslim communities sitting side by side with their neighbours. Governance is everybody's responsibility!

At London Citizens' AGM and Awards Ceremony in City Hall in December 2011 the award for leader of the year went to Nurul Ullah for the way he has built a team of leaders, runs leadership workshops and made Community Organising the way his mosque and Islamic Centre reaches out to their neighbours and acts together with other Citizens groups for the common good.

These are just a few examples of how we are blessed to have Muslim leaders in our alliance who are able to play a vital part in working with us in the governance of our city.









The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) throughout his life strived for a just and fair society for all, using a common agenda to build relationships and bind people together to work for the good of the community – one example of this is the Covenant of Virtue. This paper looks at how this covenant can find expression in the current context and given the situation of Muslim communities in the West today. Taking examples from Islam and highlighting case studies from our work with mosques and Islamic institutions we explore a vision and methodology for the future of the community. We propose Community Organising as a way to make positive change in our communities, based on the concepts of justice, leadership and relationship building, and we believe this finds synergy with the Islamic principles that were used to establish a more just society across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

“This paper is an opportunity to share our stories and vision for how we can continue to use the lessons and teaching from Islam and practical application of Organising to build powerful communities and improve our societies... This is our humble offering of advice for leaders interested or involved in Community Organising.”

*Junaid Ahmed, East London Mosque & London Citizens Trustee  
Dr Safraz Jeraj, Hyderi Islamic Centre & Chair of Lambeth Citizens  
Dr Abdul Karim Khalil, Director, Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre*

“We encourage all other mosques and Islamic institutions to be involved in broad-based Organising, building powerful alliances in our community for the common good.”

*Dilowar Khan, Director, East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre*

“In a society where we are increasingly cut off from each other, forging relationships and making our organisations more relational should be high on the list of priorities... From all angles, stronger relationships have led to revolutionary results for our service users and for our organisation’s power base across the borough.”

*Sumer Mehmet, Head teacher, Young Muslim Academy at Lewisham Islamic Centre*

