



Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation

Muslims in America: Community, Interfaith, Democracy and Political Participation Summary Report



2015 INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAM Uganda & Tanzania Delegation

July 22 – August 15, 2015



Uganda/Tanzania ~ Baltimore ~ Washington - New York ~ Washington ~ Norfolk –
Baltimore - Uganda/Tanzania

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMS (IOP)

Partnership building between people, countries and civilizations is critical in the world we live in today. Establishing these relationships begins by fostering mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's culture, history, religion and way of life. We can do this in a number of ways, but personal and professional dialogue and face-to face interaction helps to break down barriers more quickly, in order to achieve this lofty goal. We all must become "Global Citizens" and realize that what happens in our society impacts societies around the world.

Clergy, Scholars, Teachers and Policy Makers are key players in this endeavor. They have the ability to reach to the hearts, souls and minds of those with whom they engage and minister to. We must make opportunities for these leaders to venture out and begin this process themselves.

Throughout this report, you will read about and view a sampling of meetings, activities and the one-day conference in which the delegation was involved.

The delegates were very interested in the *Supreme Court* and the *Briefing with a Court Fellow* as they learned about sources that were essential during the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. They had a chance to sit in the court chamber that considers the concepts of "*Religious Freedom*" and "*Separation Between Church and State*".



The delegation also had the pleasure of meeting with Imam Yahya Hendi, Founder and President of *Clergy Beyond Borders* (CBB) and Muslim Chaplain at Georgetown University to learn about his experiences as a "*Muslim Chaplain in America*".

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMS

IOPs are two or three-week journeys of intensive thought and experience designed for clerics, scholars, religious educators and community leaders. Participants are invited through U.S. Embassies in foreign countries to take part in and observe communities around the U.S.

From February through April, delegates may also be able to “observe” the international youth leadership, intercultural and interfaith conference called *Better Understanding for a Better World*, which is known to cultural exchange students as the *BUBW*.

MUSLIMS IN AMERICA: COMMUNITY, INTERFAITH, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This program introduces Ugandan and Tanzanian Imams and community leaders to American Muslim Communities. African countries undergoing social and political change like Uganda and Tanzania can benefit from the exchange of ideas with other societies. Opportunities for dialogue are especially important.

Muslims in America provided these influential leaders with the opportunity to witness authentic moderate religious education critical for inspiring scholars to engage in collaborative efforts that can provide positive changes across society. The program challenged them to find their own voices so they could advocate for their communities basic health and educational needs. They also witnessed grassroots social and political involvement and realized the importance of living in a society free to exchange ideas and opinions openly.

The United States offers countless examples of both individual and collective success in the areas of interfaith, democracy, and political participation. It is only when everyone feels their voices are being heard and their contributions are welcome, will you have the necessary elements for a secure foundation and a future full of hope, freedom and cooperation.



DIALOGUE



UNDERSTANDING



COMMUNITY



INTERFAITH

July 25-31 (MD – DC)

- Program Orientation
 - Religion & Culture in a Pluralistic World: The History of Interfaith in America
 - Integration into American Society: Perspectives & Processes in the U.S. compared to Africa/Middle East/Southeast Asia
 - Discussion on Interfaith Cooperation - *Common Efforts: Let's Put Our Words into Action!*
- Good Governance & Transparency: A Recipe for Success
- The African Community in Maryland
- Involvement in Building Communities and Neighborhoods
 - Shelter for Muslim Women and Children in Need
 - The History of African Americans in Islam (History, Legacy and Involvement)
 - Prominent Roles of African American Muslims in the Reintegration Process, Social Services and Community Awareness Projects in the City
- Volunteerism, Community Service and Giving Back to Society (Muslim Community Center Clinic)
- The Halal Certification Process in the U.S.
- The Importance of Mastering Communication Skills for Dawah

July 31 – August 3 (NY)

- Developing Diverse, Respectful, Multi-Cultural Muslim Communities
- Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE)
- Compassion in our Daily Lives: A Call to Action
 - The Importance of Outreach – In Partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of New York
 - 9/11 and Efforts to Bring About Better Understanding
- Disarmament, Peace and Security, Human Rights, and the Millennium Development Goals
- The Ugandan Diaspora (Ugandan North America Association)

August 3-9 (MD - DC)

- The Role of NGOs in Promoting Interfaith Relations
- Education and Islam in America
 - Islamic Studies for Undergraduate Students in U.S. Colleges
 - Shari'ah Curriculum in the 21st Century
- History of Separation between Church and State (The Supreme Court)
- Closer Look at our Judicial System
- Protection of Religious Freedom
- Muslim Involvement & Participation in a Democratic Society
- Resolving Conflicts & Promoting Peace (United States Institute of Peace (USIP))
- Engaging Government, Media and Communities (*Muslim Public Affairs Council*)
- Training Session 1: Building on New Experiences: Developing Activities and Programs
- The Role of African Diaspora in America (One-Day Conference)
- Spirituality, Cooperation & Understanding Among People of the Book: Where Faith Meets Social Needs

August 9-10 (VA)

- Cultural Sensitivity Training in the U.S. Military (Old Dominion University - Major Russell N. Reiling, Jr)

August 10-15 (MD - DC)

- Involvement in Building Communities and Neighborhoods – cont'd
 - Educating Our Youth
 - Muslim Officers in Law Enforcement
- Practicing Islam in America: Adjusting to Life as an Exchange Student in the U.S.
- Interfaith Perspectives: Building Healthy Societies w/ People of the Book - Consistent Message in the Qur'an
 - Jewish-Muslim Cooperation in American Society
 - Establishing Islamic Communities in the U.S., including Media
- Training Session 2: Imams Training, Potential Follow Up Activities for IOP Alumni and Crafting Proposals
- Preparing for the Journey Home

THE 2015 IOP UGANDA & TANZANIA JOURNEY

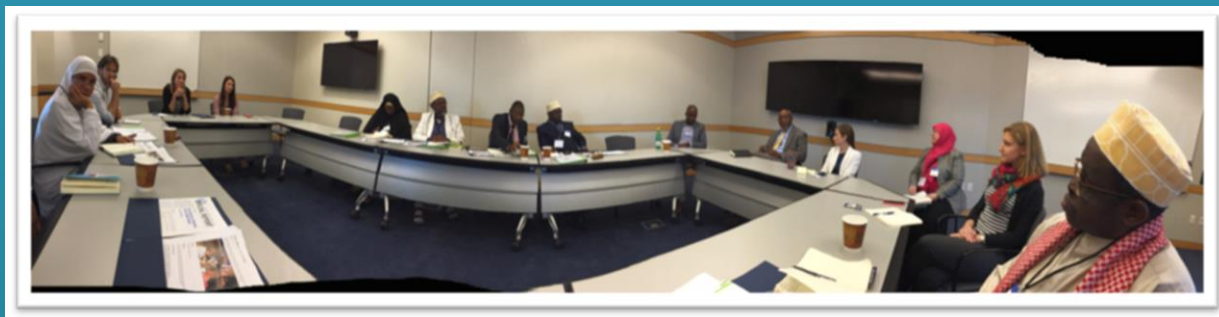
MUSLIMS IN AMERICA

The 2015 International Observers Program combined a mixed group of Ugandan and Tanzanian Imams, Community Leaders and Teachers. It was marked with numerous enriching and engaging moments. For many participants this was a journey of self-exploration, challenging their preconceived notions and moving them towards being not just Ugandans and Tanzanians, but citizens of a global society and leaders in the world.

The three-week experience marked for many the first exposure to Western Culture and challenged their concepts of what it is to be a Muslim in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as the U.S. where Muslims are the minority. Given their backgrounds, they are in the unique position to influence the knowledge and attitudes presented to future Islamic leaders in East Africa. As their countries and the Islamic world are reshaped by events around the world and the impact of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the program has provided them with the experiential context of what it means to practice religion in a free and open society. People cannot advocate for what they do not understand or know. The International Observer Program supplied a foundation from which to build upon and prepare them to advocate for new paradigms in their own communities.

This final report highlights only a few key events that epitomize the journey, which the Delegation experienced while traveling in America. The examples selected show a foundation of new experiences from which the Scholars can apply to their work and lives in their countries. These examples exemplify key concepts of the Program that include:

- Developing future globally-minded Islamic Scholars and the role of understanding the West in fostering these leaders
- Practicing religion in democratic societies and the importance of inter-faith and Intra-faith cooperation
- Opportunities for improved secular relations and finding common ground



Islamic Education in America & Educating Islamic Leaders in the 21st Century



The delegates visited Al Basheer Seminary, an Islamic educational institution, founded by Imam Mohamad Bashir Arafat and located in Baltimore, MD. He established this seminary, interfaith center and institute in an effort to make Islamic education accessible to members of the American society. Clergy and scholars from abroad will also be interested in attending courses, programs and conferences offered. The seminary will provide a strong Islamic education for up and coming Imams, who will live in and understand the culture of the U.S. and the difficulties that people in this society face.

Al Basheer is working to function at a level comparable to the best religious seminaries and general institutions of higher education in the U.S., in order to produce western born religious scholars. The delegates understand the importance of developing future scholars that have a sophisticated understanding of the intellectual history and culture of the West, which could meet the needs of our changing world.

Although suspicion directed toward Muslims is a continuing issue in the United States, the West is also demonstrating a desire to create a more open and tolerant society. Al Basheer provides a realistic model of how Western countries can produce educated Islamic scholars, who can represent Islam as a viable and relevant faith in the West, as well as in the Middle East.

Sectarian violence persists in many countries throughout Africa and the Middle East and is a major element of friction between the two sects of Islam. Tensions are often played upon in political and cultural conflicts that aim to continue discord throughout the world.

The delegates were able to experience these similarities first-hand and left with a profound experience from which to pull and apply in their own lives when they returned home.

The two seminars of the Imams Training took place at the beginning and at the end of the program. The first training focused on the proper understanding of the globalized world of today and the position of the Muslim community in a pluralistic Africa. In comparison to the bigger picture of the "pluralistic world" of today.

The second Imams Training drew examples from the meetings, interactions and discussions that took place throughout the three-week program. As we began reflecting on the delegates impressions, they realized how much the Imams and community activities of today require emphasizing on peaceful interactions with others. The negative impacts on the social, economical and intellectual well-being of society are quite evident when radical interpretations of religion replace the teachings that invite Muslims to be global citizens, to lead and compete in knowledge, science, technology and, above all, to be a role model of civility and display respect of cultural and religious diversity.

Promoting Interfaith Opportunities in Communities: Foundations for Understanding, Cooperation & Trust

The interfaith experience of the Muslims in America is an advanced one. The outreach activities increased substantially after the 9-11 terrorist attacks. The community, at large, felt that the only protection we would have against ignorance, prejudice and misperceptions is *"Interfaith Outreach and Education"*.

Participating in interfaith events throughout the program led to several spiritual moments as Christian and Islamic clergy showcased practices of the Abrahamic Religions and focused on the Universal nature and message of these world faiths.



In New York, the delegation attend Sunday Service at *The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine*, which was followed by a tour of the historic cathedral. Afterward the delegates met with representatives of the Archbishop of New York, participants of an Interfaith Study Tour in Morocco with CECF in July 2014 called *Spirituality and Giving in Ramadan*, and members of the Episcopal-Muslim Outreach Committee. This gathering of Christian Clergy elaborated on the kind of "faith-based activities" that are carried out by the Episcopal Community in New York and also discussed their involvement in CECF's Interfaith Study Program in Morocco in 2014.



Promoting Interfaith Opportunities in Communities: Foundations for Understanding, Cooperation & Trust

- Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat brought the delegation to the *MCC Medical Clinic*. Their mission is to provide compassionate and high quality medical care to uninsured, indigent adult residents of our community regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or national origin. It opened its doors in 2003 with the commitment to provide high quality basic healthcare services free to the uninsured population of age 18 and above of the community. It has assembled a remarkable group of volunteer physicians and staff who not only share their vision, dedication and commitment but also donate their expertise and personal funds to this noble cause.
- A meeting at the **Baltimore City Police Department (BCPD)** with Major William Marcus, Officer Robert Horne, Liaison to the Muslim Community in Baltimore. Officer Horne spoke excellent Arabic due to his studies in countries in the Middle East. It was an amazing experience for the delegates to hear from the police about the way they address Community Relations and ensure that everyone is protected. Among many issues discussed were the important roles that Officer Horne plays as the Liaison to the Muslim Community in Baltimore, Chaplain in the prison system and an educational resource for his fellow colleagues.



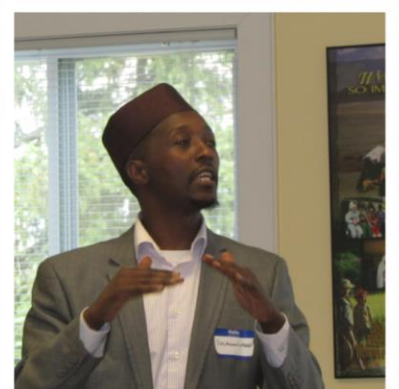
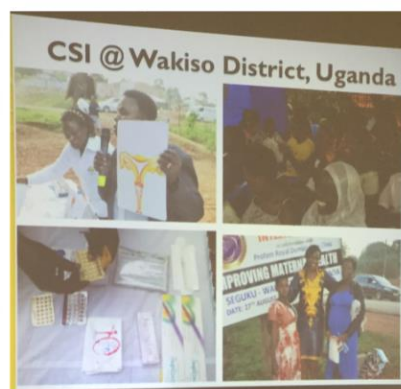
- The meeting at the U.S. Department of State with Shaarik Zafar, **Special Representative to Muslim Communities** was an amazing opportunity for the delegates to see how well integrated Muslims are in America and how members of all segments of society cooperate with each other as “Americans”.



Role of the African Diaspora in America Conference

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

- Encouraging the African Diaspora to think of potential projects that they can conduct in various African countries
- Shed light on what others are doing
- Partner with CECF and its various programs to create something similar in their countries
- Encouraging the African Diaspora to partner with Al Basheer to establish branches in their countries that promote progressive understanding of "Muslims in the 21st Century"
- Having the African Diaspora to promote harmonious relationships with other religions and cultures, local and global cooperation with other faith traditions on sustainable development programs and peace building programs that promote tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity



Role of the African Diaspora in America Conference



The African Diaspora and its mobilization that has brought about new partnerships between host countries and home countries. As a result, new business and economic opportunities have formed. The delegates had a glimpse of the potential of members of their communities in America to bring back home in terms of

Economical, technological and educational development. Some of the participants said: I have been here in the Washington Metropolitan area for more than 10 years and no one brought us together. It gave them also an opportunity to meet the diverse African migrants; their contribution to America and what they could do also back home

Politics, Education, Religion and Societal Involvement

Education in various forms and Spirituality are very important to build a cohesive society that welcomes involvement of not only men, but also women and children. The **International Cultural Center (ICC)** <http://www.theicc.net> is an example of combining spirituality in education, social and political engagement and empowering youth and women to live up to their potential and serve as inspiration in so many fields throughout the society.



As the delegates toured Washington, DC and visited sites and memorials, they talked with individual protesters, who were outside the White House expressing their views. The freedoms that the delegates have been learning about such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of press, etc... are practiced and supported by U.S. citizens regardless of their perspectives and backgrounds.

Politics, Education, Religion and Societal Involvement



The delegates pray Jumu'a prayer (Friday Community Prayers) Capital Hill in Washington, DC. The number of Muslims (men and women) that attended this service was such a surprise to the delegation. America has and continues to make room in society for its citizens to live a full life with the potential to prosper.



Impacts of the 2015 IOP: THOUGHTS FROM THE ALUMNI

Since returning to Uganda and Tanzania, the program continues to influence the Imams, Community Leaders and Teachers. Many of the delegates still engage regularly with Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat (CECF) seeking continued guidance, support and opportunities for cooperation as they apply the skills and knowledge learned during the 2015 International Observer Program (IOP).

Imam Hameed Nsubuga of Uganda has been quite active. He has provided support for the establishment of the **Uganda Muslim Woman Civilisation Initiative (UMWC)**, which was inspired by Imam Arafat's 2nd Speaker Program in Uganda in October 2015. Imam Hameed also traveled to Indonesia to attend the 2015 International Better Understanding for a Better World Conference (BUBW-Indonesia). The IOP to America provided him with the experience to request CECF to have representation in Uganda and conduct the same BUBW Conference for the youth of Uganda and East Africa. Imam Ibrahim Raganyi has helped to organize Interfaith activities in his town of Toro Toro and Sheikh Fadhil Soraga has been in contact with Imam Bashar several times as he organized events in Tanzania. All of the delegates have been involved in intra-faith and/or inter-faith dialogue at some level and continue to follow the path of moderation. They have had the benefit of experiencing Islam in a very diverse democratic society. They have and will continue to serve as ambassadors of positive change passing this knowledge and experience on to their communities and encouraging dialogue and exchange rather than isolation and conflict between the faiths and cultures that exist in our world today.



Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation (CECF) would like to give special thanks to the U.S. Embassies in Uganda and Tanzania for supporting the 2015 International Observer Program (*IOP*)



CECF Staff and Volunteers wish the International Observer Program Delegates much success and happiness in their future endeavors.

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