



# Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation



## **2017 International Observer Program: English for Translation Purposes Program - Egypt** *Understanding Cultural Nuances for Translation*

### **Summary Report**

**November 4-23, 2017**

**Cairo - Baltimore - Washington - New York - Hartford – Boston**

Submitted By:

Sarah Arafat

Program Coordinator, IOP: ETPP-Egypt

Email: [sarafat.cecf@gmail.com](mailto:sarafat.cecf@gmail.com)

Date Submitted: 1/5/18

**Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation (CECF)**

1502 Woodlawn Drive Suite 105, Baltimore, MD 21207, 410-944-6077, [info@cecf-net.org](mailto:info@cecf-net.org), [www.cecf-net.org](http://www.cecf-net.org)

## **International Observer Program (IOP)**

Building partnerships 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 one society impacts societies globally. Clergy, scholars, and teachers are key players in this endeavor. They have the ability to reach to the hearts, souls and minds of those with whom they engage. 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.

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 to take part in and observe communities around the U.S. and for training in specialized areas.

## **English for Translation Purposes Program (ETPP): Understanding Cultural Nuances for Translation**

The English for Translation Purposes Program (ETPP) introduces Egyptian scholars, Imams, and professors to American Muslim Communities and community leaders in order to benefit from the exchange of ideas with other societies. Providing opportunities for dialogue allows for the development of mutual understanding which is critical in the world we live in today and also in the professional lives of our delegates. By fostering such understanding and appreciation of one another's culture, history, religion and way of life allows for the delegates to understand cultural nuances for translation purposes. Understanding such nuances can allow the delegates to find deeper meaning in text beyond the surface. Often times words are defined not just technically but also contextually. Understanding these cultural nuances are critical to producing accurate translations.

## **2017 IOP: ETPP-Egypt Journey**

The *2017 IOP: English for Translation Purposes Program* uniquely combined a group of 4 women and 8 men from the Muslim community in Egypt. These delegates serve as religious and community leaders, junior faculty members, Imams, and professionals in Egypt working at various institutions in Egypt such as Al-Azhar University and AmidEast. This trip 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 Egyptians, but citizens of a global society and leaders in the world. The 19 day experience marked for many the first exposure to Western culture and interaction with people of many different faith and cultural traditions. It challenged their preconceptions of what it is to be a Muslim in a multicultural and multi-religious society such as the U.S. where Muslims are the minority. There were three returning delegates, Ahmed Hamza, Ahmed Hamido, and Ahmed Bahaa who built upon their previous experience here in the US.



#### **IOP Delegates:**

Ahmed Abdelmougheith Hamza Ahmed  
 Yomna Ahmed Hasan Atwa Alghandour  
 Mahmoud Ahmed Mohamed Kamel  
 Ibrahim Hesham Ibrahim Issam Newigy  
 Huda Ahmed Abdou Mansour Ibrahim  
 Asmaa Mohamed Yusef Abdelreheem  
 Ahmed BahaaEldin Mohamed Anis  
 Osama Ebrahim Mohammed Elsayed Youssef  
 Ahmad Sobhy Muhammad Mustafa  
 Ahmed Hamido Abdo Ali Mohamed  
 Maha Salah Hassan Elsayed Abdallah  
 Usama Fathallah Abdallah Khaled

Given their backgrounds, they are in the unique position to influence the knowledge and attitudes presented to future Islamic leaders in the Arab world. As their country and the Islamic world continue to be reshaped by events around the world, including the impact of the ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East, this 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 IOP supplied a foundation from which to build upon and prepared them to advocate for the needs of everyone in their society and new paradigms in their own communities. It also provided them with the much-needed opportunity of learning how to communicate and engage in dialogue with American people from various segments of the society. For the six delegates who work in the Al-Azhar observatory where they translate highly sensitive information, having such opportunities will help them understanding how to more efficiently and appropriately engage in global dialogue.

This final report highlights the key events their journey which the delegation experienced while traveling in America. The examples selected for this report show experiences from which the scholars can apply to their work and lives in their countries. These examples exemplify key objectives of the Program that include but are not limited to:

- Understand that the culture of the target language plays a huge role in the way the translated message is understood by the target language speakers.
- Become acquainted with the social, religious, cultural and political affairs of the Muslim American community.
- Realizing the need for training on religious and cultural pluralism.

# 2017 PROGRAM AT-A-GLANCE

## **November 5-8 (MD)**

Orientation  
WORDE Seminar and Workshop  
UMBC: Intercultural Communication Styles Workshop  
Attorney General

## **November 8-11 (DC)**

Middle East Institute  
Pew Research Center  
US Department of State  
Library of Congress  
Georgetown/ACMCU  
Tour of DC  
American University  
Reflection Session

## **November 12-14 (NY)**

Episcopal Diocese- St. John the Divine  
Islamic Cultural Center of New York  
WISE  
NY Mayor's Office & Counterterrorism Division  
Radical Grace Documentary Viewing  
United Nations

## **November 15-16 (CT)**

Reflection Session 2

## **November 17-22 (MA)**

Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center  
American Academy of World Religions Conference  
Reflection Session 3/ Pre-Departure Meeting

The day after their arrival to the United States, the delegates received a two-day orientation with Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, Father Bill Au, Pastor of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart and Al Basheer Faculty, and Robert Stucky, Al Basheer Faculty. During the orientation, the delegates were given an overview of CECF's activities, learned about the history and progress of interfaith in the United States, and discussed the importance of cultural diversity programs for clergy in the Abrahamic faiths. The orientation also enabled the delegates to witness the successful working relationship and friendship between a Muslim imam and Catholic priest.



## *Baltimore, MD*



### **Orientation Presentations**

- Imam Bashar presented on: “The Importance, History and Impact of Translation of the Qur’an/Other Religious Texts Around the World”.
- Robert Stucky, Al-Basheer Faculty, presented on: “The Importance of Cultural Nuances and Understanding Readership: Challenges of Translating Religious Texts for a Cross-Cultural Readership”.
- Father Bill Au, Al-Basheer Faculty, presented on “Religion & Culture in a Pluralistic World: The History of Interfaith in America and Its Contributions Toward Preventing Radicalism”. He also presented on: “The Importance of Communication and Correct Terminology During Interfaith Initiatives, Outreach and Dialogue”.

### **WORDE**

In Montgomery County Maryland, Mehreen Farooq led an informative seminar & workshop focused on community-led initiatives to build resilience against violent extremism (BRAVE) & other countering violent extremism (CVE) related issues. Her seminar also managed to highlight the lives and accomplishments of Muslims living in an amazingly diverse part of the country. The delegates were impressed with the research, ideas and community engagement that the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE) uses to combat radicalization and open up the channels of communication which identify the causes of conflict within communities. The parallels between the work of WORDE and The Al Azhar University Observatory truly struck a chord with all in attendance.



### **UMBC**

The translation department at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) led a 4-hour seminar and workshop focused on “Intercultural Communication Styles That Impact Translation and Interpretation” with a special focus on “Cultural Nuances When Translating for Western Audiences”. These brilliant interactive seminars not only were thought provoking and held their attention, but will enhance their skills as translators.



## Maryland Attorney General

Our last meeting in Baltimore was with Mr. Harvey Eisenberg, the Assistant U.S. Attorney Chief of National Security for the District of Maryland and the Coordinator of the Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council of Maryland. The delegates also met with FBI SAC, Assistant Director and Agents focusing on “Preventing Terrorism Presentation”. Additionally, 3 delegates presented on Azhar’s efforts to counter violent extremism and prevent radicalism through the Observatory. Overall, it was an amazing experience for the delegates to hear from these high ranking law enforcement officials about the way they address Community Relations and ensure that everyone is protected. Among many issues discussed were:

- How threats are evaluated
- Communication between different law enforcement agencies
- What agency is responsible for addressing specific threats
- What action is necessary



## Washington, DC



### Middle East Institute (MEI)

At MEI, the delegation met with a panel of experts on the Middle East, language and religion and they shared a summary of American Attitudes on Middle East Policies. Five delegates shared the efforts of the Al Azhar Observatory and the many campaigns they run in Egypt to counter violent extremism and prevent radicalism.

### Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank based in DC that conducts research, analyzes data, and published reports on an array of issues. During our visit, we were introduced to the mission and efforts of the Pew Research Center, followed by a discussion on U.S. Muslims and the Future of World Religions. One interesting prediction that the delegates left with was that in 70 years, the number of Muslims on Earth is expected to exceed the number of Christians, who currently hold the position of largest religious group in the world.





## U.S. Department of State

After introducing themselves and the work of the Al-Azhar Observatory, the following State Department officials introduced themselves and their respective offices: Ms. Madison Connolly from the **Global Engagement Center (GEC)**, Mr. Oliver Wilcox from the **Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism** and Mr. Warren Kofsky from the **Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF)**.

This meeting was an opportunity to hear about how religion fits into government. The delegates were briefed on the separation between church and state. In this meeting they got to hear about how the government engages clergy.

Additionally, each of the State Department officials noted the importance of working towards the promotion of greater ties in the world and increasing cooperation. The delegates engaged in deep discussion with Mr. Connolly on this subject especially.

There were times in this meeting when the conversation became intense due to unexpected criticism of Al-Azhar's curriculum and policy of reconciliation techniques between Christians and Muslims from one of the State Department panelists. The delegates experienced "free speech" in action and it was a learning experience for them. They realized at the end of the meeting that they didn't ask all of the questions that they wanted because they got caught up in a side conversation. This was a lesson learned that they remembered in future meetings which resulted in more fruitful discussions.





## Library of Congress

The delegates went on a tour of the Library of Congress with Joan Weeks and Giulia Adelfio, Director of Visitors Programs (National and International Outreach). While inside, everyone was amazed not only with the scale and grandeur of the location, but also the country's dedication to knowledge. The delegation also met with Fawzi Tadros, a research specialist of the Arab world.

## Georgetown University

We stopped at Georgetown University to learn about Islamic Studies Education in the U.S. We met with Dr. John O. Voll, Professor Emeritus of Islamic History and Hannah Sullivan, a senior research fellow working on "The Bridge Initiative" at Georgetown. Topics discussed at this meeting included some of the following topics: how the West views Al-Azhar, how Al-Azhar can take advantage of positive publicity stemming from Islamic pop-culture sources, the origin of the word "moderate" and what it means today, and techniques to engage the public in your work.



## American University

Before arriving to American University's Key Lounge for Jumuah (Friday community prayers), we were greeted by Professor Ghiyath Nakshbendi, Executive in Residence and faculty of the Department of International Business. Students from the Muslim Student Association joined the delegation in prayer and in discussion afterwards. The space used for Jumuah is actually an interfaith space. It is often reserved by Christians, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists for religious activities. It is also used for club meetings and community activities. Being able to see how Muslims integrate into a majority non-Muslim school was an insightful unique experience for the delegation.



## *New York City, NY*

### **St. John the Divine**

Visiting the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, located in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of New York City, was one of the most important visits for increasing the delegates' exposure and awareness of the many interfaith initiatives developed in the United States, building understanding, and removing misconceptions. The delegates received a private guided tour of the 19th century Gothic-Revival cathedral and learned about how people from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week.

Visiting the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, one of the world's largest Anglican church, also marked the first time many of our Muslim delegates had entered a church. They were able to closely observe mass, communion, and the liturgical influences on the art and architecture of the sanctuary.

Throughout the mass service, the delegates were able to follow along with the printed out prayers and hymns which they were allowed to keep as a reference. During the tour, the delegates engaged in a lengthy discussion with a parish member on the implementation of interfaith programs and committees, as well as the church's role.



### **Islamic Cultural Center of New York (ICCNY)**

Sheikh Ali Mashhour and Sr. Latifah welcomed the delegation to the main masjid in New York City. The goal of this meeting was to learn about pluralism and inclusivity in American Muslim communities as well as Islamic education in the U.S. This center also has a private school serving children from preschool through 8th grade. We were given a tour of ICCNY and engaged in a deep discussion on the founding of the center, how it is currently run and the fact that now it is self-funded. In the middle of our catered lunch, the delegates were happily surprised to be able to witness someone take their shahada (declaration of faith). According to Sheikh Mashhour, 1-2 people convert each day. The ICCNY is a wonderful example of a diverse Muslim community that keeps its members involved in many efforts. The center offers many classes for new Muslims, runs charity events, and operates many other activities.



## Women's Islamic Initiatives in Spirituality and Equality (WISE)

While in New York, the delegates were given the opportunity to meet with the influential founder of the WISE and the Executive Director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), Ms. Daisy Khan. Ms. Khan has created a number of important intra- and interfaith programs and has led numerous interfaith events. To strengthen the collective voices of Muslim women, she created WISE and through WISE, develops ways to eradicate misunderstandings about Islam in America and the West. Daisy shared the inspiration for her new book *Community Guide Development- Sharing Islam*, which she has split into three simple sections: Islam in America, Islam versus radical ideologies, and preventing extremist recruitment. Everyone was amazed by the book when they had a chance to flip through it. There was talk of having Al-Azhar's translation center translate her book into multiple languages which the delegates saw value in. They were delighted to meet with Daisy. This was a very important meeting related to their work in Egypt and they benefited a great deal from hearing about her various initiatives and technique of handling misconceptions about Islam. The delegates very much respected the success of her efforts and felt inspired by her passionate leadership.

## New York Mayor's Office

### The NYC Mayor's Office and Counterterrorism Division

**Representatives** met with the delegation to discuss outreach efforts of local government to the Muslim community and discuss some challenges they face. After two delegates presented on Al-Azhar's efforts to counter violent extremism and prevent radicalism through their many campaigns and projects, the Mayor's representatives were able to learn about common challenges facing government when acts of terror occur. Due to the separation of church and state in the U.S., the Mayor's office had a different method of managing these situations compared to Al-Azhar. The NYC police department cannot put people into mandatory religious counseling or refer them to Al-Azhar. They did however find the Fatwah Center especially intriguing since you are put into direct contact with a scholar. The other topic that sparked much discussion was in regards to the challenges of Muslims in America not having a unified voice to stand behind. Such a meeting was very interesting for the delegates due to their work at Al-Azhar Observatory and the opportunity to hear from the law enforcement officers in a city like New York City.





## ***Boston, MA***

### **Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC)**

The ISBCC plays an important role in the Boston, Massachusetts community as it provides the local Muslim community a space to pray and worship as the largest mosque in New England. While they do not have a full time day school, ISBCC offers Sunday school classes and organizes a variety of educational and social activities that provide wonderful opportunities for the entire community to learn and grow.



The delegates were able to attend Jumua prayer on Friday and were impressed by the size and diversity of the Muslim community, the amount of youth present in the mosque and the message of unity, self-love and the importance of family delivered by Associate Imam Abdul-Malik Merchant. They heard Imam Merchant directly address the fears of his Muslim community considering the disconnect between generations in families, a common problem among families in the US. In the reflection session following the visit, several of the delegates remarked on how impressed they were with the organization of ISBCC and how the mosque represents certain ideals found in America: diversity, inclusivity, and gender equality.

### **American Academy of Religions (AAR) Conference**

The annual AAR Conference brings together thousands of professors and students, authors and publishers, religious leaders and interested laypersons every year. Co-hosted with the Society of Biblical Literature, the Annual Meetings are the largest events of the year in the fields of religious studies and theology. More than 10,000 people were in attendance this year and more than 1,000 sessions were offered. The delegates were required to attend one session together that was dedicated to translation, but were free to choose sessions afterwards that were tailored to their personal interests.

In addition to the wealth of knowledge they received from the numerous sessions attended, they also spend time at the receptions networking with theologians, scholars, academia, and entrepreneurs from around the world.







Some of the sessions that the delegates attended were:

- Interpreting Divine Language
- Islamic Books in Manuscript, A Material Analysis
- Crossing Borders, Transcending Boundaries: The Shifting Contexts of Muslim Politics
- Al-Azhar University on the Responsibilities of Minority Muslims Living in Non-Islamic Societies
- Oral and Written Transmissions at the Intersection of the Bible and the Qur'an
- Back from the Front Lines of Diplomacy: A Religion Scholar Reflects on the Role of Religion Expertise in US Foreign Policy
- Reading Text through Pre-Text: Redefining Isma'ili Hermeneutics



## Educational and Entertaining Excursions in New York and Washington

Interspersed throughout the weeks of meetings was free time to sightsee in Washington, DC and New York City, NY. Providing time for the delegates to explore each city's offerings and streets enabled them to experience first-hand the diversity of America's citizens, its pluralistic nature, and pieces of its history.

In DC, the delegates found Afghani and Turkish restaurants for lunch and dinner, as well as had a private tour of DC where they took pictures in front of:

- U.S. Navy Memorial
- U.S. Capitol Building
- White House
- World War II Memorial
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
- Korean War Memorial
- Lincoln Memorial
- Vietnam Memorial



In NY, the delegates had innumerable choices for food each day and at night ventured into times square for gift shopping. While shopping, they were also witnessing the melting pot of people who visit from all over the world as well as those from a variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds who claim New York as their home.

We went on a ferry boat where many delegates took pictures in front of the Statue of Liberty. The delegates had an opportunity to view a documentary called **Radical Grace** at the local Jewish Community Center which was accompanied with a discussion by a panel of women each representing a different religion. We also made sure that the delegates had a chance to visit the United Nations to learn more about their mission and objectives, as well as enjoy a private tour of the building.



## **Reflections on the Impact of the 2017 IOP: ETPP-Egypt**

Throughout the delegates' three-week trip, CECF organized time for reflection sessions. The sessions provided the delegates with an opportunity to reflect and be debriefed on their program experiences. There were three primary reflection sessions during this IOP and the delegates were able to share with CECF staff their thoughts, ideas, comments, and concerns from their IOP experience, as well as discuss their next steps once they return to Egypt. The delegates expressed to CECF how much their perspectives of the United States had shifted over the course of the program. They were pleasantly surprised to find the American people kind and friendly and admired how people from other faiths and minority groups are included and accepted here. One delegate mentioned how she had worried that there was no Islam in America and was concerned about coming here as a Muslim. Much to her relief and surprise, she felt she had been treated very well and that she fit right in, especially in the metropolitan areas.

There were many other important insights shared over the course of the program, including:

- It is important to visit different places of worship to enhance understanding and develop relationships with other faiths.
- It is important that Imams help their congregation to learn the context of the Qur'an and its verses.
- That through observing the friendship and respect between Imam Bashar and his Catholic counterpart, Father Bill Au, interfaith collaboration is possible, if it is built on trust, friendship and a shared vision.
- It is important to listen to understand, not only to defend.
- Interfaith exists and is alive in America. So many faiths and minorities live in love and cooperation here. This experience could and should be shared with others.

Since returning to Egypt, the program continues to influence the delegates. Many of them still engage regularly with Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat and CECF staff seeking continued guidance, support and opportunities for cooperation as they see issues with a new perspective and knowledge learned during the 2017 IOP: ETPP and for the three returning delegates, the 2014 IOP as well. They have had the benefit of experiencing the practice of Islam in America in a very diverse 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 thank the U.S. Embassy – Cairo for its continual support without which the program would not be possible. We would also like to thank our partner AMIDEAST and look forward to working with them on future programs. The IOP and programs like it seek to develop cultural and religious understanding and improve perspectives thereby preventing conflicts and alleviating unnecessary tension between people of varying backgrounds. CECF appreciates and is proud that exchange programs play an important part in achieving the United States' goals of improving and strengthening relationships among cultures, America & the Muslim world.*

