

Festival of Muslim Cultures: UK 2006

Patron: HRH the Prince of Wales

A celebration of the rich cultural and artistic expressions of Muslim peoples: advancing understanding, promoting harmony and facilitating interconnectedness

The Overview

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The lack of understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures by the West is profound. That vacuum is being filled almost exclusively by negative media reporting of current conflicts in the Muslim world, breeding a climate of fear and hostility towards Muslims. One of the consequences is that young Muslims in the West are being increasingly alienated from the societies that they live in. The Festival of Muslim Cultures, a celebration that places contemporary and traditional Muslim Cultures centre stage in the UK, is a powerful advocate for a positive re-valuing of the Muslim world.

The Festival is developing a programme of arts events in partnership with a wide range of leading arts organisations from the British Museum to local libraries. We are also promoting the development of an arts programme generated by the Muslim community in the UK and facilitating the connections between these two initiatives. The role of the Festival is to inspire collaboration, to coordinate the results of those collaborations and to produce an exciting programme that will have a long-term impact on the cultural landscape of the UK.

Highlights of the developing programme are:

- World music events with the best international artists
- A Festival of contemporary film with leading international participants
- A Humanities Festival addressing the most urgent issues today
- Poetry and literature events across the UK
- Exhibitions of historic and contemporary art with some of the UK's leading museums and galleries
- A life-style fair of food and fashion from the Muslim world
- Parties and opening and closing celebrations

Amongst the long-term outcomes of the Festival, of benefit to UK society in general, will be the transmission of artistic skills through Creative Skills Workshops. We are inviting leading Muslim artists, architects, film-makers, writers, poets, dancers and musicians to lead training schemes for young Muslims and non-Muslims. As part of the schools programme, information on the arts, history, religion and civilisations of Islam will be made available on the Web for all teachers to use as a teaching resource in schools. Muslim school children will also be invited to take part in a video mapping project called Young, British and Muslim, in which they are the film-makers. There will be programmes for and about women, creating a greater space for Muslim women within UK society.

Rt. Hon. Tony Blair M.P. Prime Minister says:

“The Festival of Muslim Cultures gives us an opportunity to reflect on the positive impact that Islam has had in Britain and the rest of the world. Islamic art, science and literature have enriched all our lives over centuries and, of course, British Muslims have contributed hugely to this country's success, prosperity and culture. I am delighted to send my best wishes to everyone involved in organising the Festival. “

Festival Structure and Anchor Events

Month	Theme	Anchor Event(s)
January	Culture and Communication	Opening celebrations (Eid al Adha). A Humanities Festival for public engagement with leading Muslim thinkers.
February	Film and Media	Film Festival and conference with leading film-makers from across the Muslim world
March	Poetry	Poetry readings by Muslim poets from the UK and abroad in venues across the UK
April	Music and Dance	International collaborations to create programmes of world music and dance
May	Contemporary arts	The British Museum opens an exhibition of contemporary visual art
June	The Environment and Gardens	Launch of the construction of an interfaith Islamic peace garden in a public park. Conference on environmental issues in the Muslim world
July	Traditional arts	Tented week-long celebration in a London park with pan-Muslim participation and evening music events. Victoria and Albert Museum re-opens its Islamic Gallery
August	Youth	Music concerts, outdoor events at UK Melas. An international youth conference. A kite-flying festival
September	Fashion and jewellery	Muslim dimension to London Fashion Week Jewellery exhibitions
October	The Diaspora	An exploration of the cultures of diasporas of all faiths Ramadan and Eid al Fitr
November	Women and Food	Food events and promotions of Muslim cuisine across the UK Women's programme
December	Transition	Launch of Institute of Muslim Cultures to continue the Festival's projects

The Festival's projects and programmes will take place both in London and in a number of partner cities across the UK, in particular those with significant Muslim populations. These include the Yorkshire region (where the new cultural enterprise company Alchemy Anew is developing the regional blueprint for the Festival), Leicester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Manchester. We are also developing a two-day programme for the 2006 Hay Literary Festival.

HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan says:

"At a time when true Islam is being misconstrued in some quarters, this timely and inclusive Festival can help place the discourse between adherents of all faiths back on a rational platform. In the words of Imam Shatibi of 14th-century Spain, "enhancing commonalities and respecting differences" should be our motto in an increasingly diverse world. I wish the Festival every success."

The people supporting the Festival:

Trustees:

- Raficq Abdulla M.B.E. (University Secretary of Kingston University, lawyer, interpreter of Rumi and Attar, broadcaster and writer)
- Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi, (Head of International Development, Al-Khoei Foundation, London)

Advisory Board:

- Shiban Akbar (for the Muslim Council of Britain)
- Syed Mohamad Albukhary (Founder Director of the Museum of Islamic Art, Malaysia)
- Dr Zaki Badawi O.B.E. (Director of the Muslim College of Britain and Chairman of the Imams and Mosques Council and Shari'ah Law Council)
- Fuad Nahdi (Editor in Chief, Q-News)
- Professor Azim Nanji (Stanford University, CA, and Director, the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London)
- Sir Gulam Noon M.B.E. (Chairman, Noon Group)
- Terry Sandell (Director, Visiting Arts)
- Haroon Sugich (Executive Vice President, TRACCS, Dubai)

The Festival Director is Isabel Carlisle (former Deputy Head of Exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, co-curator of "Aztecs", and a former art critic for The Times)

The Project Manager is Abdul-Rehman Malik (a contributing editor at Q-News, and a frequent participant in TV and radio debates on Muslim issues, education policy and youth and community issues)

Honorary Board: Lord Ahmed of Rotherham; Rt. Rev. Richard Chartres, Bishop of London; Satish Kumar, (editor of "Resurgence"); Neil MacGregor, (Director of the British Museum); Mr Risal M. Risaluddin (The Calamus Foundation); Dr Richard Stone (Chair of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality); Baroness Uddin (more to be added)

Advisors: Luqman Ali (Artistic Director, Khayaal Theatre Company); Omar Al Qattan (Sindibad Films); David Barrie (Director of The Art Fund, ex Japan Festival); William Dalrymple (author); Alistair Duncan (Al Tajir World of Islam

Trust); John Gordon (CEO of Xtreme Information and co-founder of Intelligence Squared); Syed Tajammul Hussain (artist); Rose Issa (contemporary art curator); Mohamed Keshavjee (Institute of Ismaili Studies); Dr Ghada Karmi (Palestinian peace activist and author); Philip Lewis (Department of Peace Studies, Bradford University); Rohema Miah (national Bangladeshi researcher and community advisor in the UK); Baqer Moin (Head of Persian/Pashto Services, BBC World Service); Mehri Niknam (C.E.O. The Maimonides Foundation); Mushtak Parker (Editor, Islamic Banker); Venetia Porter (British Museum); Malise Ruthven (author); Peter Sanders (photographer); Dr Mona Siddiqui (Department of Islamic Studies, Glasgow University); Ahdaf Soueif (author); David Sulzberger (Director, Ahuan Gallery); Sir Harold Walker (former UK Ambassador to Baghdad); Mike Waldron (The Prince's Trust); Tim Winter (Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge University)

Funding & Sponsorship:

Funding for the festival is being sought from many sources including government, non-government, trusts, individuals and commercial sponsors. As an independent organisation that is non-political and non-factional the Festival reserves the right to decline funding from sources that are not in accord with its aims and objectives. Corporate sponsors are being offered a range of options tailored to their particular requirements and interests. The Festival will be discussing with them the different ways they might wish to participate in this significant international event.

The Arts Council, The British Council, The Esmee Fairbairn Trust and UnLtd. have supported the Research and Development phase and money from individual donors has allowed the Festival to develop without being tied to any agenda. The Festival has now engaged a fundraising team to raise the necessary funds. The UK-wide provisional budget figure is £6 million over three years (2004-2006) of which the core costs of organising and promoting the Festival represent some £1.5 million. This figure compares favourably with the £18 million expended in 2001 on the Japan Festival in the UK.

Conclusion:

The Festival will be the first event of this kind to be held in Britain since the World of Islam Festival in 1976. Thirty years ago there was little public understanding of the fundamental interconnectedness of Muslim and Western civilisations. Today it seems the situation is little better. There are over 1.8 million Muslims living in Britain who enrich British culture with the cultures of their countries of origin. Muslims form the second largest religious group in the UK, yet the need for greater understanding, tolerance and bridge-building has never been greater. It is one of the most urgent issues facing the world today.

Contact details:

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