

## **HISTORY OF MUSLIMS IN IRELAND**

### **Brief History**

The documented history of the Islamic presence in Ireland goes back to the 1950's. This was represented in the Muslim student's who came to Ireland to study. Before this time very little or nothing is known about Islam and Muslims in Ireland. The first Islamic Society in Ireland was established in 1959. It was formed by the Muslim students and was called the Dublin Islamic Society (later called the Islamic Foundation of Ireland). At that time there was no Mosque in Dublin. The students houses and some rented halls for Jumu'ah (Friday) and Eid prayers. In 1969 the students began to contact their relatives and some Islamic organizations and Muslim countries for the purpose of collecting donations to establish a Mosque. In 1976 the first Mosque and Islamic Centre in Ireland was opened in a four story building at No. 7, Harrington Street, Dublin 8. Among those who contributed to the project of the Mosque and Islamic Centre was the late King Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz, may Allah have mercy upon him. In 1981 the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in Kuwait sponsored a full time Imam for the Mosque.

A few years after the establishment of the first Islamic Centre and Mosque in Dublin, the Mosque became too small for the increasing numbers of worshippers. The Muslims in charge of the society started a second campaign to collect donations in order to establish a bigger Mosque. In 1983 the present building of the Dublin Mosque and Islamic Centre was bought, renovated and the headquarters of the Society moved from Harrington Street to 163, South Circular Road, Dublin 8. The building at Harrington Street was later sold as it was no longer used as a mosque, and from the money it generated some Waqf (endowment) property was bought in the area of the new Mosque.

### **Some of the important dates in the Islamic existence of Ireland include:**

1978, the Galway Islamic Society (in the west of Ireland) was established, and a house was rented to be used for the Jumu'ah and congregational prayers in the city  
1981, a house was bought in Galway to be used as a Mosque for the Muslims in the City.

1984, the Cork Muslim Society (in the South of Ireland) was established. Cork is the second largest city in Ireland after Dublin. A house was rented for the Muslims to perform their prayers.

1986, The Ballyhaunis Mosque in the Northwest of Ireland was built.

1990, the Muslim National School in Dublin was opened. It is the first Muslim school recognized and funded by the Irish Department of Education.

1994, a house was bought in the city of Cork to be used as a Mosque for the Muslims in the City.

1994, a house was bought in Limerick in the Mid-South of Ireland to be used as a Mosque for the Muslims in the City.

1996, the Islamic Cultural Centre was opened in Dublin following a generous donation by Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Governor of Dubai and Minister of Finance and Industry in the United Arab Emirates.

1999, a branch of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland in the City of Waterford was formed. A house was rented for the prayers and classes for adults and children.

### **First General Meeting of Muslims in Ireland**

#### **GENERAL MEETING ON 23rd JANUARY 1959**

On 23rd January (Friday) 1959, a general meeting was held at Koinonia House with the purpose of deciding whether or not to form a Muslim committee, which would organise Friday Namaaz (Prayer), Eid Namaaz and some lectures.

Thirty three students of the Muslim Faith and who belonged to various countries, gathered at the meeting. The matter was discussed and a vote was taken to finalise whether such a body was wanted or not. It was unanimously accepted to form the body. It was also agreed the functions of this body would be decided by the students (Muslims).

The following officials were elected:

Chairman: Mr. Hoosen Lockhat

Secretary: Mr. Yousuf Jhavary

Treasurer: Mr. Ismail Docrat

Committee of 8 members:

Hoosen Lockhat

Ismail Docrat

Zakudeen Zaveri

Ahmad Al-Atrash

Yousuf Jhavary

Ebrahim Mannah

Harith Lamki

Abdullah Al-Kathiri

#### **COMMITTEE MEETING ON 7TH FEBRUARY, 1959**

On Saturday the 7th February 1959 a committee meeting was held at Koinonia House, 33 Harcourt Street, Dublin. The committee sanctioned that the holding of the Friday Namaaz (Prayer) and decided that Fasting time-tables should be printed for the forthcoming fasting season. The committee also decided that arrangements should be made for accommodating a large crowd Eid Namaaz.

It was hoped that a name for the body would be decided upon at the next General meeting.

It was agreed at this meeting to print circulars and inform students who follow the Islamic faith, that prayers would be held on Friday at Koninia House.

The information in the above section is taken from the Dublin Islamic Society General Meeting Book

### **Formation of the Dublin Islamic Society**

#### GENERAL MEETING ON 17th APRIL 1959

On Friday the 17th April 1959 a general meeting was held at Koninia House, 33 Harcourt street, Dublin (Circulars announcing this meeting and also Eid Namaaz – on 10th April were distributed.) One of the main purposes of holding this meeting was to decide upon a name for the Muslim Body, which was formed at an earlier meeting - on the 23rd of January 1959. At the meeting the following three names were suggested:-

- 1) Dublin Islamic Jamaat was suggested by Mr. Hoosein Jamal
- 2) Islamic Study Circle was suggested by Mr. Yousuf Jhavary
- 3) Dublin Islamic Society was suggested by Mr. Ragaa Makharita

Mr. Jamal withdrew his suggestion in favour of Mr. Makharita's suggestion. Then the vote was taken to decide between the two names- Islamic study circle and Dublin Islamic Society. The majority voted for Dublin Islamic Society, and hence forth that name was used for our Muslim Body in Dublin.

It was decided at this meeting that there must be no subscription fee levied on anybody who participated in the activities of this society. If anyone does wish to donate any money to the Dublin Islamic Society, it will be accepted. It was emphasised that donations would be purely voluntary and that there would be no compulsion.

The treasurer had mentioned at this meeting that a voluntary collection on Eid day (10th April 1959) had realized that £10. It was agreed that 5 pounds would be sent to the orphans of the Algerian freedom fighters and the other 5 pounds would be added to the kitty of the Society. Mr. Makharita and Yousuf Jhavary further donated £1 + £3 respectively and this was added to the Algerian total of £9 in all. That £9 pounds was sent to the Algerian government (in exile) in Cairo.

Later, the Chairman left the floor open for any suggestions people wanted to make.

Mr. Abdullah Al-Kathiri kindly suggested that the society should hold "discussion groups". It was decided that this suggestion should be postponed to some later date after the body was able to stand on its feet, the society too young then and had to muster its energies in arranging to hold Friday and Eid Prayers.

During the suggestions that followed, some students showed anxiety concerning the power of the committee. However, the chairman assured them and reiterated that the people govern the committee and that the committee had no power to carry out

anything else (besides their duties) on their own.

Mr. Ragaa Makharita very kindly offered to spend one to two hours a week voluntarily to coach any students who wished to learn the Arabic language.

Later the Chairman, Mr. Hoosen Lockhat, tendered in his resignation due to ill health. Therefore, a new President was voted in, and a Vice-President was also elected since the new President intended leaving Dublin at the end of June, 1959.

The new President was Mr. Rajaa Makharita – proposed by Mr. Abdullah Al-Kathiri and was seconded by Mr. Ismail Docrat. The elected Vice-president was Mr. Essop Ravat- Proposed by Rafiq Jhetam and seconded by Mr. Yousuf Jhavary. (Mr. Ravat later became the President in June when Mr. Makharita departed from Dublin.)

The former Chairman, Mr. H Lockhat thanked everybody for their co-operation and brought the meeting to a close.

(From the General Meetings Book of the Dublin Islamic Society.)

### **First Irish Mosque and Islamic Centre** ISLAMIC CENTRE PROJECT

The establishment of an Islamic Centre in Dublin has been a long-cherished aim of the Dublin Islamic Society. It was in 1969, when there were about 100 Muslim students, that it was decided to regard the students as a "social unit" – in fact a community, thereby necessitating the need for acquiring a Centre incorporating a prayer hall with facilities for ablution and an Islamic library.

Since then, the number of Muslim students increased steadily and several families, mainly of professional persons, settled in Dublin, thereby bringing the Muslim population to the present 300 or so.

The majority of Muslims are still, however, students, but there are at least 60 who are permanently settled here. Considering the steady increase of Muslims, the Islamic Centre project has, as it was claimed initially, been initiated with a view towards the future; a foothold for Islam will, insha-Allah, be established in Ireland.

A fund raising campaign was initiated in 1969, directed mainly at parents and relatives of students studying here. The vigorous publicity that accompanied the fund raising campaign was initiated amongst others by brothers Abdullah Lamki and Dr. Abdur Rehman Ismail and maintained subsequently by various brothers and sisters serving on the Centre Project Sub-Committee. Over a period of five years the envisaged amount required for the purchase of a modest property suitable for the purpose of an Islamic Centre was, thanks to Allah, realised. The trend of donations received is set out below:

Yearly Period	Donations received and lodged with bankers in Dublin	Cumulative amount of funds lodged with Bankers in Dublin
April 1969 – March 70	£1,104.00	£1,104.00
April 70 – March 1971	£1,565.00	£2,699.00
April 71 – March 72	£1,183.00	£3,852.00
April 72 – March 73	£1,733.00	£5,585.63
April 73 – March 74	£22,455.37	£28,041.00

Of the larger donations received were the following:

The government of:

Abu Dhabi (March 1973)

£1,518.00

His Majesty, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (March 1974)

£17,914.28

Approximately £6000 awaits transfer to our bankers here in Dublin, this is being the Balance of the funds raised during the summer of 1972.

(Copied from the Dublin Islamic Society's General Meetings Minutes Book 1974.)

### **Report of Oxford Intelligent Library on the History of Islamic Society in Dublin**

"The History goes back as far as 1950, when only a few numbers of Moslems were living in Eire".

1950-1955, the numbers of students from South Africa, North Africa and India were

increasing. A good number of the students were mainly studying medicine and partly English and Science.

Moslem's students were first arrived to Eire, with a few expectations of immigrant for settlement. Students mostly were chosen to live at the Rathmines, Harrington Street, Leeson St., South Circular Road, etc. areas. Only a few of the Irish Christian living in Dublin become converts to Islam.

Formal prayers were conducted in private houses/flats. First Irish man to become Moslem was a Patrick Conway who renamed himself Mohammad Conway. Second name in the list was a Mr. Gerry Adam, renamed himself Abdullah Adam. No more information available.

1955-1959, First group decided to form an Islamic Charity were: Mohammad Islam Khan, Fatima Chaudry Malon, Iftikhar Ahmad, Mhammad Saleh, Mohamed Mumtaz.

1960-1965. Group of Ladies were living in rented accommodation also formed a Charity between themselves (not registered) called Islamic Centre. The gathering took place in No.7 Harrington Street and at 68 Lr. Leeson Street Dublin.

Friday's prayers by that time have taken places in rented flats and houses as well, mainly in Harrington Street where most of the flats' of houses were rented to Students.

1965-1970 Numbers of students rapidly were increasing and the campaign to raise funds started sometime in 1967/68. The requests made to the authorities in Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, UAE, Jordan and all Moslems and Islamic Centres in UK for financial assistants in order to acquire a mosque in Dublin.

In August 1970 the first message being received from Embassy of the Saudi Arabia in UK that upon receipt of the Bank Account and formation of the Islamic Foundation, the funds will be donated to the same account provided such foundation officially to be formed.

In March 1971 the students formed Islamic foundation called "DUBLIN ISLAMIC SOCIETY" (This is the date when the Society was registered as a Friendly Society.) and in October 1971 the following students became the nominee of the Trustee for opening the accounts and first members of the society.

- 1) Ebrahim Sayed, (South Africa)
- 2) Khalil Ravan (?)
- 3) Tazammul Hassan (Hussain) Hayat (South Africa)
- 4) Mohamed Hanief Khan (India)
- 5) Abdul Kader Bhabha (?)
- 6) Abdol Haqq Suleman Kajee (South Africa)
- 7) Fatima Chaudry Malon (India or Pakistan)
- 8) Hamed Hussain Nasse (?)
- 9) Hassan Kadwa (?)

Bank account opened on trust in Royal Bank of Ireland at Grafton Street Branch. Registered address was P.O. Box 548 Rathmines, Dublin 6 used for official purposes. Dublin Islamic Society replaced Islamic Centre previously (unregistered), but number of Moslem ladies continued the activities as ladies charity.

Friday prayers conducted in rented accommodation the Rathmines, in Club provided by Garda. Although No.7 Harrington Street was purchased officially in 1974, but since 1969 prayers and gatherings were conducted from time to time in the upper part of the building.

In January 1972 A Mr. Salem Azzam on behalf of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia from UK became involved in the society and the funds raised to acquire a Mosque.

In February 1973 there was a credit balance of about £18,300 in the Royal Bank of Ireland of Dublin Islamic Society account available for acquisition of a centre.

Mahmood Coovadia (Medical Student) appointed as Trustee in place of Ebrahim Sayed.

Salem Azzam received confirmation "go ahead" to buy the freehold of a property.

In April 1973 No.7 Harrington Street became officially the registered address of Society, but still on rental arrangement.

On 22 Nov 1973, Society agreed to acquire the property from Gilbert Leon White and finally on 30 October 1974 the whole building including the basement, ground, first and second floors was purchased for the price of £10,870.

In November 1975 New Trustees were appointed:

- (1) Tazammul Hussain Hayat
- (2) Ahmed Goolam Mohamed Adam
- (3) Dr. Ismail Coovadia
- (4) Abdul Hamid Nasser (1976)
- (5) Mahmood Y. Motala (1976)

In August 1976 The Society announced the official opening of No.7 Harrington Street as the Mosque of Dublin.

In December 1977 Mohamed Sadique Y. Omarjee was appointed as trustee.

In November 1978 Mr. Mazlam Mohd Zawawi appointed as Secretary.

1977-1983. The space available at No.7 Harrington Street was nowhere adequate enough to accommodate all Moslems praying during Friday Salat owing to the rapid increase in their numbers in Eire from abroad.

After further funds raising and with the major assistance of Qatar and (?) Kuwaiti Authorities and Individual donations the property at No.163 South Circular Road was acquired.

Sheikh Abdullah, Mosa Engelbrecht, Mohammad Marwan Sabbagh, Salem Azzam, Nabeel Hammad, Mamoun Mobayed, Ibrahim Adris (Idris Ibrahim) , Shaikh Yahya M. Al-Hussein, and Mudaffar Al-Tawash were appointed as trustees for acquisition of No. 163 South Circular Road.,

In July 1990 the name of Dublin Islamic Society being changed Islamic Foundation of Ireland.

In 1985 No.7 Harrington Street was sold to Argus Security Ltd.

1983-2000 Sheikh Yahya Al-Hussein as very competent and well informed man who has been leading the Mosque since and has shown actively his commitment to the Moslem and Islamic community in Eire.

He is probably considered to be a person who has achieved , with great potential , the important steps in organizing the Foundation with his very limited financial resources.

He has been trying to keep the faith away from any political interference and most certainly this has been an act of faith on his part and he is to be highly commended for his services and example.

(Oxford Intelligent Library)

Our Comment: Although this report might not be very accurate, nevertheless it provides useful information about the early history of Muslims in Ireland from an outsider perspective.)

### **Statistics**

The first trickle of Muslims arrived in Ireland in the early 1950s. Initially, they came for education, especially to study medicine at the famous Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. Perhaps the Muslim students from the Republic of South Africa were the first to arrive in Ireland for this purpose. Students then followed from India, Malaysia and the Gulf states. In the 1970's a number of trainees in aircraft engineering came to Ireland from Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. When a number of students decided to reside in this country for work, and with the arrival of a number of Muslim businessmen and traders from the U.K., the first resident Muslim community in Ireland was formed.

For many years the community was relatively small. According to the Irish census for 1991 the number of Muslims was 3,873.

Since 1991 the number of Muslims increased considerably after the arrival of Muslim refugees from Bosnia, Somalia and Kosovo, as well as asylum seekers and professionals and workers from various Islamic countries

There is a still a good number of students mainly from Malaysia, the Gulf states and Pakistan. There are an estimated number of 2,000 medical doctors. The rest are

businessmen, professionals, workers, asylum seekers, children, housewives and others. There is a number of Irish Muslims who accepted Islam and some European Muslims.

According to the Irish census 2002 the number of Muslims was 19147. The total population of Ireland was 3,917,203.

As for the nationalities of Muslims living in Ireland and their countries of origin there over 40 nationalities represented in the community at present.

As to the ideological belonging of Muslims in Ireland the vast majority are Sunni Muslims. There is a community of Shi'at Muslims from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and some Gulf states. There is a centre (Husseiniyyah) for the Shi'at Muslims in Milltown, Dublin 6.