

I Allah Den barmhjertiges, Den nåderikes navn

Rapport fra reisen til Pakistan i forbindelse med karikaturesaken (16-19 februar 2006)

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REPORT FROM THE VISIT TO PAKISTAN IN THE WAKE OF THE CARTOON ISSUE (Islamabad, 16-19 February 2006)

The delegation represented the faith communities in Norway and consisted of:

- Imam Senaid Kobilica (Vice president of Islamic Council of Norway)
- Imam Mehboob-ur-Rehman (Leader of Imam committee, Islamic Council of Norway)
- Pastor Geir Valle (Church of Norway)
- Pastor Knut Kittelsaa (Church of Norway)
- Arne Sæverås (Advisor for peace and reconciliation in Norwegian Church Aid)

The visit was organized by the Norwegian Church Aid.

The purpose of the visit was to tell the story of how we jointly were able to handle the situation created by the publishing of the cartoons in Norway 10th January 2006. We were able to deal with this on the basis of many years continuous dialogue between The Church of Norway and Islamic Council of Norway. This dialogue has established a new mutual trust and an active cooperation between the two faith communities, and has led to a warm friendship between the participants.

When the cartoons were published, we could draw on this trust and fellowship. Thanks to our dialogue experience, we could in this very critical situation overcome the obstacles by supporting each other. We relied on each other from the first day, experiencing that both sides were hurt. Both faith communities were hurt twice; first by the publications of the cartoons, then when our flag was burned in other countries.

By this mutual understanding and respect, we also received a strong sympathy from the Norwegian Government. This helped us to further the dialogue in the open community. Eventually, it also led to the apology from the editor of “Magazinet”, who published the cartoons.

During the meetings with the top religious, political and university personalities we managed to get them to listen to us with very obvious interest. We can freely be happy and satisfied with the fact that they really liked the way we function and solve problems we face in Norway. Our happiness was even bigger when we got clear signals and readiness from almost all of them to work on introducing the inter-religious dialogue and cooperation in Pakistan, which would also help them in facing and solving possible difficult issues.

All personalities we met were very positive towards our experiences and especially our handling of the cartoon issue which fortunately ended in mutual understanding, respect and forgiveness. We informed Pakistani people through their leaders and media about the excellent cooperation between Muslims and Christians, other religious communities and the Norwegian Government. As for the editor’s apology, we - representatives of the Islamic Council - said to Pakistani people that we - Norwegian Muslims - have accepted the apology from the editor and we hope that Pakistani people do the same. We are happy to say that their reaction was quite positive and acceptive. They expressed their appreciation for everything we are doing in the field of inter-religious activities.

This travel to Pakistan was also very important because of the fact that Pakistani people knew something about the positive developments in Norway concerning settling the issue of

cartoons of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), but in reality it was unclear. So our presence there and meetings with the different personalities and media were a kind of confirmation of the positive developments in Norway that they had heard about, and it was also an opportunity to tell them much more positive happenings that had taken place in Norway. Furthermore they did not have our joint statements and the editor's apology. All this was quite necessary to get a clear picture of the situation in the Norwegian society and its attitude towards the published cartoons. The fact is that everybody has hailed and praised this move to come to Pakistan and tell the Norwegian story in person, including top Pakistani politicians such as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Religious affairs.

In the end we can confirm that our visit was given good coverage in almost every newspaper, TV and radio station. This means that the ordinary people in a way have come to know about us and our activities. That is why we hope that Norway will be spared from any kind of unjust act.

We should mention that everybody we met was interested and requested us to do something in order to have a law on international level which protects sanctities in all religions from sacrilege.

The delegation had meetings with several religious leaders, governmental representatives and the press. The details are given below.

The delegation arrived in Islamabad on 16th February. Directly after the arrival we had an introductory meeting with the ambassador Janis Kanavin and minister councillor Alf Arne Ramslie at the Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad. On the same day the delegation had meetings with Maulana Muhammad Hanif Jalandhry, the leader of World Council of Religions – Pakistan (WCR-P); bishop Mano Romalshah from Peshawar, also representing WCR-P; director Anis Ahmed and other leadership of Rifa International University; and Maulana Naim Shaker, a shia leader from Brotherhood Movement.

On 17th February the delegation visited the Institute of Policy Studies and had a meeting with the director Dr. Khalid Rashid and his staff. We also met Maulana Fazul Rahman, the leader of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), that is an alliance of the religious parties. He is also the leader of the opposition in the Parliament and work closely with the president of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Quazi Hussain Ahmed, whom we did not get a chance to meet.

Later on the same day we met the advisor to the Prime Minister, Ali Durani, to plan the meeting with the Prime Minister and the press conference. Durani has an important position in the ruling party, Pakistan Muslim League, Quade-Azam (PMLQ). We also met prof. Ghafoor Ahmed and Maulana Abdul Malik. Prof. Ghafoor Ahmed is vice president of the Jamat-e-Islami.

On Saturday 18th February we started the day with a breakfast with the ambassador Kanavin, followed by a meeting with acting president of the International Islamic University, Dr. S. M. Zaman, and Minister for Religious Affairs, Ijaz ul-Haq and the present press in his office. The main press conference was held at afternoon and there was a wide coverage. Seventeen TV-stations were present, including PTV and al-Jazeera, in addition to national and international newspapers, and news agencies, e.g. Reuters. After the press conference we had meeting with the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. Several interviews were given to the press afterwards. The delegation returned to Norway on Sunday 19th February. There was a considerable attendance

by the media at Oslo Airport. The members of the delegation gave interviews to three TV-channels and several newspapers. Geir Valle also commented the situation in Pakistan directly in the TV-news from the NRK studio.

Some pictures from the trip are shown on the following pages.

Senaid Kobilica

Vice President – Islamic Council of Norway

PICTURES FROM THE TRIP

PRESS CONFERENCE:



MEETINGS:



Meeting with Norwegian ambassador Janis Kanavin and minister councillor Alf Arne Ramslie



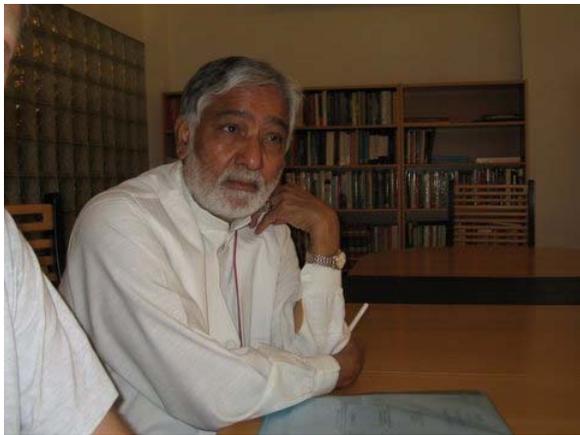
Delegation members together with Maulana Fazul Rahman, the leader of the MMA and opposition leader in The Parliament (3rd from left)



In the meeting with the Minister for Religious Affairs, Ijaz Ul-haq



In the meeting with Maulana Naim Shaker, a shia leader from Brotherhood Movement



Bishop Mano Romalshah fra Peshawer



In conversation with he vice-president of the International Islamic University in Islamabad



The members of the delegation together with the director of Riphah International University, Anis Ahmed (2nd from left)



The members of the delegation together with the leadership of The International Islamic University in Islamabad