



OCIS NEWS

OXFORD CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Royal Charter Granted to The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

The grant of a Royal Charter was celebrated at an event hosted by the Centre's Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, at St James's Palace in London on Tuesday 15 May 2012. The reception was attended by senior representatives of the collegiate University of Oxford, by British politicians of all parties, by many friends and supporters of the Centre from home and overseas and by representatives of academic institutions with which it maintains links.

Royal Charters, granted by the Sovereign on the advice of the Privy Council, have a history dating back to the 13th Century. They are now only granted to bodies that work in the public interest and which can demonstrate pre-eminence, stability and permanence in their particular field. The University of Oxford and many of the Oxford Colleges, as well as a number of other leading British academic institutions, are similarly incorporated by Royal Charter.

In his speech The Prince of Wales described the Charter as a truly historic award – the first Islamic organization to be so honoured in the long history of this country. He went on to emphasise the Centre's role in promoting a better informed understanding of Islamic culture and civilisation and the challenges facing Muslim communities, adding that only from such understanding can we increase the dialogue, respect and tolerance which underpin our national values.

The Centre received messages of congratulation from the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and



The Prince of Wales with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Centre and the Director

the Deputy Prime Minister as well as from many other friends and supporters around the world. The Centre's Director, Dr Farhan Nizami, issued a statement warmly thanking all those who have encouraged and assisted the Centre's development over more than 25 years.

Among the guests at the reception were the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato Sri Najib Razak, Dr Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Chairman of the Centre's Board of Trustees), HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Dr Shaikh Mohammed Al Sabah, HRH Raja Dr Nazrin Shah and HRH Princess Basma. Also present were Ministers from Brunei, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, as well as other leading personalities from the Arab World, South-East Asia and Central Asia.

Many Ambassadors and High Commissioners attended the reception, led by the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, HE Mr Khaled al Duwaisan. The academic world was strongly represented by guests from universities and institutes from around the Islamic world and beyond, as well as Pro Vice Chancellors, Heads of House and other senior academics from the University of Oxford.

British politicians from across the political spectrum, including the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Attorney General and the Minister of State for Universities and Science also joined the celebration.



The Prince of Wales with the Prime Minister of Malaysia

Patron Celebrates the Centre's Achievement

HRH The Prince of Wales made the following speech at the St James's Palace reception:

Your Royal Highnesses, Your Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

al-salam alaikum

Having been Patron of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies for the past eighteen years, I can only say what a great pleasure it is to mark the grant of a Royal Charter to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. This is a truly historic award – the first Islamic organization to be so honoured in the long history of this country. The tradition of the Royal Charter stretches back to the thirteenth century. O.C.I.S. now joins an august family of Charter holders which includes distinguished livery companies, centres of academic excellence including our ancient Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and charitable organizations.

And at this point being an old Cambridge man can I just mention that Cambridge got its Royal Charter ten years before Oxford.

Many of you here this evening were far-sighted enough to see the importance - and potential - of the Centre in its very early days in the mid-1980s. I can only offer my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your support, especially the Centre's Trustees, past and present, and the University of Oxford which has worked so closely and effectively with the Centre.

Much has changed since the Centre began its life in a wooden hut on St. Cross Road! If I may say so, that hut is



a very far cry from the magnificent new building which has risen off the end of The High, behind Magdalen College, which so harmoniously recalls Matthew



Arnold's "Dreaming Spires" together with classical Islamic styles. But, while the building has changed quite a bit, the academic principles on which the Centre was founded – excellence in scholarship, dialogue, discussion and mutual respect – have remained constant.

It seems to me absolutely right that, here in the United Kingdom, we should do all we can to nurture an institution which not only promotes a better informed understanding of Islamic culture and civilization, and the challenges facing Muslim communities, but which can also remind both the Islamic world and the West of those timeless, universal principles of harmony

"This is a truly historic award – the first Islamic organization to be so honoured in the long history of this country"

enshrined within Islam that the world needs so urgently to re-discover in the battle to preserve the future for our descendants. Only from such understanding can we increase the dialogue, respect and tolerance which underpin our national values. This is something I have been trying to do for more than two decades. Indeed,



it was under the aegis of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in 1993 – and standing next to a strikingly young-looking Farhan Nizami! – that I set out my thoughts in a speech called “Islam and the West”. Interestingly, it is still the only speech which brings in a bit of an income each year!

I have a feeling that many of the potential problems I spoke about then have come to pass... But that simply underscores even more firmly the importance of institutions like the Centre in promoting the sort of dialogue and mutual understanding which are sorely needed in the modern world.

“we should do all we can to nurture an institution...which can...remind both the Islamic world and the West of those timeless, universal principles of harmony enshrined within Islam”

Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen, in concluding may I say once again how delighted I am that so many of the Centre’s supporters have been able to come to St. James’s Palace this evening, especially those of you who have travelled from afar. I hope that you will all join me in congratulating the Centre on a truly remarkable achievement.

National Leaders Congratulate the Centre

The grant of the Charter was warmly welcomed by British political leaders.



“I am delighted that the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies has been granted a Royal Charter. This is an important recognition of its unique contribution to the study of Muslim civilisation at Oxford, and of its commitment to the values of dialogue and mutual respect, which are at the heart of good citizenship at home, and strong British relationships overseas. I hope that the Centre will continue to play an important role in our national life in the years ahead.”

The Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Prime Minister



“The granting of the Royal Charter is recognition of the extraordinary effort and imagination that has gone into making the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies an institution almost unique in the United Kingdom in its combination of the development of Islamic learning and commitment to bringing scholars from east and west together for mutual enrichment. I hope that this latest accolade acts as a further spur to the Centre’s development in the decades ahead.”

The Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
Leader of the Opposition



“This is a hugely important moment for the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and is well deserved recognition for an organisation that has rapidly developed into a globally significant academic institution. Promoting understanding and academic dialogue is essential in developing progressive partnerships with the Muslim world and is in all of our interests, both overseas and in the United Kingdom. I wish the Centre every success for its continued contribution to promoting and improving understanding of the rich culture and heritage of the Islamic world.”

The Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP
Deputy Prime Minister

