



The Archbishop of Westminster calls for Dialogue in Action

On 27 February, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, gave a lecture at the Centre on 'Dialogue in Action: The Witness of St Francis of Assisi'. The Rt Hon the Lord Patten of Barnes CH, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, presided and made introductory and closing remarks. The lecture was attended by senior members of the University, faith leaders from across the country and members of the local community. The visit follows the Director's visit to Rome for an audience with His Holiness Pope Francis last year and forms part of the Centre's contributions to interfaith dialogue with academic institutions and faith-based organisations.

In his lecture, Cardinal Nichols sought to draw lessons from the experience of St Francis and apply them to some of the challenges of today, stressing the importance of listening, mutual respect and understanding between religions. Describing the 'dialogue of experience' as



Cardinal Vincent Nichols with Lord Patten and the Director

essential, the Cardinal revealed that his own dialogue with Muslim leaders had been based on a shared experience of being a religious minority in society. He thanked the Director for the invitation to speak at the Centre, referring
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President of the UK Supreme Court lectures on Religious Dress



Baroness Hale of Richmond

On 25 January, The Rt Hon the Baroness Hale of Richmond, President of the Supreme Court, lectured at the Centre on the subject of 'Religious Dress'. Citing cases arising from the workplace and educational institutions, in both the UK and Europe, she gave an engaging and detailed account

of the legal complexities of protecting a person's right to wear what they personally consider to be appropriate religious dress or symbols, while also protecting the rights of others. In many cases headscarves, turbans

and Christian symbols, such as wearing a cross, could be readily accommodated with a degree of flexibility on all sides (although in some European jurisdictions a political principle of secularism was argued to be overriding).

Greater complexities came when an individual regarded a full face covering as appropriate in all circumstances, including for example in a court of law. Questions then arose as to the ability of judge, jury or indeed counsel to sense with the normal accuracy whether a defendant or witness was reliable, in the absence of facial expression and the wider ability to judge body language. In these respects issues of fairness could be argued on behalf of both the rights of the individual choosing to be covered, and those whose case was being judged, arguably in circumstances of less than usual transparency.

Giving the vote of thanks was one of Baroness Hale's predecessors as President, The Rt Hon. the Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers KG, the Sultan Azlan Shah Fellow in law at the Centre.

Research project on the Maldives

This spring will mark the start of a major new research project at the Centre. The Maldives Heritage Survey aims systematically to inventory and document endangered tangible cultural heritage in the Maldives— including mosques, cemeteries, archaeological ruins and physical objects as well as the digitisation of a selection of historical manuscripts – through digital photography, 3D scanning, and GIS mapping to create an open-access online heritage database. The materials documented through this work are critically endangered, facing both natural and human threats that jeopardize the survival and accessibility of historical information for this vital node in pre-modern global economic and religious networks. This work is crucial for the people of the Maldives to hold and understand their own past, and for global scholarship on the history and material culture of this little-studied archipelago at the crossroads of an interconnected Indian Ocean world.



The project is led by Dr Michael Feener and generously funded by the Arcadia Charitable Trust. Work in country will be done in partnership with the Maldives Department of Heritage, with additional support from the Earth Observatory of Singapore. Work on the project is now starting in earnest with a specialist team in place on the Maldives.

King of Malaysia visits the Centre



HM The King of Malaysia with the Director

In February the Centre was honoured to host a visit by a most distinguished alumnus, HM Sultan Muhammad V, Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia. During his visit His

Majesty toured the facilities of the Centre's building and signed the Distinguished Visitors Book. He was briefed by the Director on the Centre's objectives and programmes and planted a tree in The Prince of Wales Garden as a memorial to his visit. During his visit to Oxford, His Majesty also received an Honorary Fellowship from St Cross College, of which he is also an alumnus. His Majesty's visit further strengthens the Centre's relationship with a country that has a long history of not only supporting its scholars and visiting fellows but also acting as its partner in conferences and other academic projects.

Uzbekistan

Academic links strengthened

The Centre welcomed a delegation from Uzbekistan led by the Director of the Islamic Civilization Centre, Dr Shaazim Minovarov. Accompanied by Ambassador Alisher Shaykhov, the delegation comprised representatives of several leading academic institutions and followed up the Centre Director's visits to Tashkent, including one visit to attend the inauguration of the new library of the Al-Biruni Institute for Oriental Studies in Tashkent. Constructed with support from the Sultanate of Oman, the impressive new building houses an important manuscript collection. The inauguration ceremony was followed by a conference

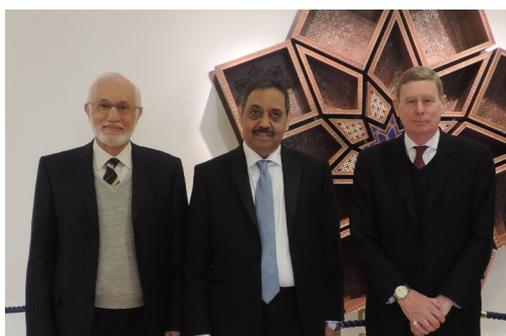


Ambassador Minovarov with Ambassador Alisher Shaykhov in the Centre's exhibition gallery

focused on manuscript research methods. It is hoped this shared interest will lead, in the first instance, to developing joint projects on the conservation and digitisation of manuscripts.

Saudi Arabia

Collaboration with King Saud University



Dr Abdullah Al Subaiy, Director of the King Salman Centre, with the Senior Bursar (L) and Registrar (R)

In February, the Director of the King Salman Centre for Historical and Civilization Research Studies of the Arabian Peninsula, Dr Abdullah Al Subaiy, visited the Centre to discuss opportunities to cooperate on a variety of research initiatives. The text of a Memorandum of Understanding was considered and the joint activities (provisionally agreed by both Centres) included a forum during the next academic year on a science-based approach to historical research.

Ninth SC-OCIS Roundtable on Enhancing the value of Islamic capital

The ninth annual SC-OCIS Roundtable on Islamic Finance was held in Malaysia in March and focused on 'Enhancing the Value of Islamic Capital Market through Social and Impact Investment.' The conference considered a number of themes, including: Mitigating Inequality and Climate Change through Economic Transformation and Demonstrating Effects of the Impact of Social Investing (specifically Quantum Solar Park Sukuk and Sustainable Waste Management). The conference sought to explore how 'Impact investing' brings together entrepreneurs, investors, foundations, public-sector leaders, non-profits, and intermediaries all in the effort to use private capital for public good.

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Ranjit Ajit Singh, Chairman, Securities Commission Malaysia, welcomed the delegates in his inaugural speech and the Centre's Director, Dr Farhan Nizami, also gave an address at



HRH Sultan Nazrin Shah with the Director

the inaugural session.

HRH Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, Sultan of the State of Perak, Malaysia and the Royal Patron for Malaysia's Islamic Finance Initiative delivered a special keynote address. The two-day conference brought together industry practitioners and scholars including five former recipients of the SC-OCIS Islamic Finance Visiting Fellowship Programme.

Ambassador Afif Safieh lectures on Palestine/Israel: History is undecided...

On 15th February, Ambassador Afif Safieh, formerly Palestinian Representative in London, Washington and Moscow, delivered a lecture at the Centre titled 'Palestine/Israel: History is Undecided...' He reviewed the history of conflict in the region and the many



HE Ambassador Afif Safieh

attempts by the Palestinians to secure their national rights by peaceful means.

Regrettably, the international community had engaged in a "peace process" that was all process and had not

led to peace. The Palestinians supported the creation of the "Quartet", but this proved to be little more than a vehicle for US policy, which (as exemplified by the recent decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem), has been consistently one-sided.

He argued that it was simply not acceptable to ignore the rights of an entire nation; international law had to prevail over national whim. The international community, through the Security Council, had a duty to safeguard the rights of the Palestinians. Analysing potential solutions, he argued that two states remained the only option capable of delivering independence and stability to both parties. Given the imbalance of power, a so-called "one state solution" would invite continued discrimination and denial of the basic human rights of the Palestinians.

Seminar series

Religion, politics and development in Muslim societies

In Hilary 2018 the Centre convened a seminar series that covered wide-ranging topics under the broader rubric of 'Religion, politics and development in Muslim societies.'

Professor Bassam Fattouh (Oxford Institute for Energy Studies) opened the series with a talk on 'Oil Markets and the Political Economy of Reform in Saudi Arabia.' He was followed by Professor Eric Chaney (Oxford) on Islamic science and Professor Jean-Philippe Platteau (University of Namur) on 'Islam Instrumentalised: Religion and Politics in a Historical Perspective.' Professor Danny Quah (National University of Singapore) spoke on the 'Global Shift in Economic Power' with respect to smaller states and China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Dr Toby Matthiesen's (University of Oxford) talk on Sunni-Shi'i relations was followed by Dr Adnan Naseemullah (King's College London) on 'Political Order and Disorder in Pakistan's Northwest'. Dr Nemat Bizhan (Blavatnik School of Government) examined 'Foreign Aid and State Building in Afghanistan after 9/11'.

The series was concluded by Professor Simon Quinn (Oxford) speaking on Islamic Finance, and Professor Saumitra Jha (Stanford University) speaking on 'Trade and Tolerance: What Can We Learn from South India?'

LORD PANNICK QC

Lord Pannick gave a lecture on ‘The Right to Freedom of Religion: Cases and Controversies’. He examined the sensitive nature of disputes where the religious feelings of one individual or group come into conflict with legal provisions to prevent discrimination against protected categories.

PROFESSOR BOWLES

Professor Samuel Bowles, (the Behavioral Sciences Program, Santa Fe Institute) spoke on ‘The Moral Economy: Why good incentives are no substitute for good citizens’.

Dialogue in Action Strengthening partnerships

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...to an increasing recognition that education was an important pathway by which all faiths make a contribution to wider society. The visits to the Centre of both the Archbishop



The Chancellor with the Director and the Archbishop of Westminster in the Prince of Wales Garden

and Lord Patten provided the opportunity to talk about the Centre’s research activities and programmes and discuss ways to strengthen cooperation on projects and systems (examples include the effort to improve the integration of the University’s and the Centre’s library systems). The Centre’s Academic Advisory Committee (composed of senior University academics) is another useful forum in which the Centre can share its own priorities, ideas and experiences with colleagues in the University. The sharing of ‘best practice’ is becoming ever more important at a time when Higher Education in the UK is evolving to meet many unique challenges. Both visitors toured the building and signed the distinguished visitor’s book before planting trees in the Prince of Wales Garden.

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