

ISNA Canada President's Message to Community December 8, 2015

I had presented a report to the community, in March of this year, on ISNA Canada initiatives and activities. This message provides an update on the progress being made on those initiatives and activities. Much has taken place over the last few months.

I. Reaching out to ISNA Canada Stakeholders

Among the significant actions is the work of the Strategic Planning Committee. A representative sample of stakeholders with various backgrounds, experiences, and geographical regions of Canada were approached for an online survey. They responded, even some who are now overseas but are interested in making ISNA serve the Muslim community more effectively. The results of the survey were processed and arranged in meaningful categories such as perceived ISNA Canada strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities that ISNA Canada should make use of, and mitigate the threats that may stand in the way of ISNA Canada plans. The respondents also rated ISNA Canada on its current competencies and made suggestions on desirable goals for further action.

Selected stakeholder from GTA area, Ottawa, Montreal, and Vancouver were invited for a day long strategic planning session on Sunday, November 29, 2015, at ISNA Canada HQ premises. Over three dozen people with impressive credentials in terms experiences, accomplishments, and community connections participated in this day long session.

The participants, divided into some seven groups, developed prioritized lists of ISNA Canada internal strengths and external opportunities as drivers to develop the desired goals for implementation, while taking into account the ISNA Canada internal weaknesses and preparing to overcome the impact of external threats. These lists were then presented to all the participants for refinement into overall meaningful and workable lists, Each group also added items that they considered important. These outputs were was posted for all to see and used in identifying the goals to focus in developing an action plan for ISNA Canada.

The goals submitted by the groups were then consolidated into the following broad areas of actions for ISNA Canada:

1. Social services
2. Finance
3. National standing
4. Noticeable increased activity in media and communications
5. Developing resources and building ISNA Canada capacity
6. Membership growth and outreach

The Strategic Planning Committee will take all spoken and written inputs coming from the day-long session of the stakeholders for describing specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-sensitive (SMART) goals, detailing each goal into activities to be carried out and expected outcomes, developing strategies needed for each goal, and putting it all together as an action plan for ISNA Canada to be implemented over the years 2016-2020.

II. ISNA Canada HQ Human Resources Development and Management

At its physical meeting on April 12, 2015, the ISNA Canada Board passed a motion to establish ISNA Canada Personnel Committee. The personnel committees are usually responsible for planning, monitoring, and overseeing the organization's use of its human resources (paid and voluntary). ISNA Canada Personnel Committee was given the charge for developing needed personnel policies, including policies for HR performance evaluation, management and supervision, employee compensation and benefits, and handling of grievances.

ISNA Canada Personnel Committee has spent considerable time in developing an Employees Handbook that includes policies and procedures applicable to employee work environment, compensation and benefits, leaves of absence, handling grievances, avoiding conflict of interest, interpersonal relations and etiquette, confidentiality of corporate information, performance reviews, and other governance matters. The Employee Handbook document was approved by the ISNA Canada Board at its meeting on May 15, 2015.

The Personnel Committee has reviewed the job descriptions of employees, and a systematic year-end evaluation of employee performance is now being carried at ISNA Canada.

Another major area of responsibility for the Personnel Committee was to review employees salaries, taking into account the previous salary adjustments in 2013. Guided by the Qur'anic spirit to give each person his or her due whether asked or not, the Personnel Committee studied the issue of fair wages by accessing the document produced by the Charity Village on HR in not-for-profit organizations like ISNA Canada. We looked at the data on salaries in ISNA Canada peer institutions as well as aspirant institutions. Salaries at level 1 (CEO) ranged from a low of 27,000 to a high of 360,000 based on the charity revenues, corporation size, educational qualifications relevant to the job and experience. Level 2 salaries such as directors and managers are about 10% less than level 1, and level 3 another 10% less. Taking all the relevant factors into account, the Personnel Committee recommended, to the ISNA Canada Executive Committee and the Board, the salary norms for ISNA Canada employees. After approval from the Board, those norms were implemented resulting in appropriate adjustments for all employees, taking effect retroactively from January 1, 2015.

A major challenge and work in progress area for the Personnel Committee as well the Executive and the Board is to bring into the HR the spirit of team work, cooperating as friends, uplifting each other, giving trust and trusting others in the achievement of all rightly guided actions. There are issues of transparency inhibited by exaggerated self trust and unjustified lack of trust in others. It requires proper cultivation of socio-ethical values of Islam with knowledge of corporate interests, patience and perseverance. There is progress being made in this area.

III. Fiscal Due Diligence

Regulatory agencies, such as the CRA, keep a close eye on revenues and expenses of a charity. The charity submits an annual financial statement to the CRA. The responsibility for verifying and approving the financial statement lies with the corporation's Board. Transparency in recording financial transactions is an essential requirement in order to prevent errors and

omissions. ISNA Canada Bylaws identify two individuals as responsible for ensuring an accurate and easily verifiable financial statement. One is ISNA Canada Treasurer who has the responsibility for oversight and assurance that all financial transactions are recorded meaningfully. ISNA Canada Treasurer chairs the ISNA Canada statutory Budget and Finance Committee. The person responsible for preparing the financial statement is ISNA Canada Director of Finance and Accounting. The Bylaws also stipulate that ISNA Canada Director of Finance and Accounting report to and is responsible to the Board, and the Executive Committee.

Keeping in mind the need for proper recording, monitoring, and steering corporation's financial transactions, a formal process of preparing an annual ISNA Budget was instituted several months ago. A draft of the budget was presented to the ISNA Canada Board at its meeting on November 28, 2015. With input from the Board, the Director of Finance will submit the prepared revised budget to the ISNA Canada Budget and Committee, and after review by the Committee, it will be submitted to the Board for approval.

IV. ISNA Canada Events and Activities on the Pacific Coast.

ISNA Canada's record of events and activities in the GTA area is truly impressive, as was reported earlier in the previous message to the community. There is an ISNA outreach to community from coast to coast through emails, online publications and interactions as well as through popular internet media such as the facebook and twitter. However, in recent years due to some extenuating circumstances ISNA Canada was not able to arrange conferences or seminars outside the GTA area. That has started to change. Sr. Khadija Saidi is an ISNA Canada Board member from Vancouver, BC. She has arranged two successful seminars in Vancouver and Victoria, and enrolled an impressive number of new ISNA Canada members from BC. Systematic approaches to other cities in Canada are now taking place. You may be hearing soon about ISNA Canada sponsored events in Montreal and Ottawa.

V. ISNA Canada Experiment in Professional Counselling

There are two full-time imams at the Islamic Center of Canada (ICC). They provide family counselling regularly. Although not holding the position of an imam at ICC, ISNA Canada Executive Director Shaykh Abdalla Idris Ali is active both as an imam and a family counsellor. The input from the imams indicated that there are times where a professionally trained counsellor may be needed to serve the community when family problems extend beyond the skills of imams. Keeping this input in mind, ISNA Canada approved the appointment of a part-time professionally trained and duly certified counsellor. ISNA Canada will evaluate whether or not this service should be continued for benefit of the community.

VI. Seminar on Community Approach to Mental Health and Mental Health Registry

ISNA Canada held a seminar titled 'Community Approach to Mental Health' on Sunday, October 18, 2015. The seminar was open to both Muslims and non-Muslims and aimed to educate the community on how to deal with mental health issues. It is extremely vital for us as a community to have these conversations in order to ensure we take care of ourselves mind, body, and soul.

Speakers included many distinguished psychiatrists and psychologists, a clinical counsellor, an administrator, and a scholar of Islamic shari'ah. By having a diverse panel, this seminar provided a holistic approach to mental health issues rather than focusing solely on a clinical or spiritual/religious perspective.

Dr. Khalid Sohail MBBS FRCP (Canada)'s session topic was 'Green Zone Living is Peaceful Living: Focus on Mental Health Education'. He talked about the three zones of human emotions: green, yellow, and red. When we are a little upset and frustrated, we are in our Yellow Zone, and when we get angry and lose control we are in our Red Zone. Green Zone Living helps us spend more time in our peaceful Green Zone and create Green Zone relationships so that we can live a healthy, happy and peaceful Green Zone Lifestyle.

Dr. Saadia Ahmad, Ph. D., C. Psych, spoke on the topic of 'Mental Health Challenges Faced by Muslims in North America: Lessons Learned from our Brothers and Sisters'. Her presentation focused on how to maintain mental health by fostering basic psychological needs including sustaining physical health, enjoying a sense of safety, participating as a member of family and community, and developing a sense of unique value in one's life. Without insight and education from lessons learned, individuals at-risk for serious mental illness may suffer from severe and tragic challenges as they struggle to meet their needs within their unique ecology. Clinical examples were presented including those of Muslims living in North America who have faced severe and tragic mental health challenges.

Rashaad Vahed, Vice-President, Children's Mental Health, spoke on 'Accessing Valuable Services for Your Children'. In this session, Rashaad highlighted questions that parents will at some point ask about their children, such as: Is my child's language skill developing well enough for their age? When should I be worried about their expression of emotions or mood shifts? How can I support their social development with friends and family? What can I do when my child gets stuck in problem behaviours or ways of thinking? To help answer these questions, Rashaad shared experiences gained from several leading children's mental health agencies and provided relevant resources and services available to parents.

Dr. Arif Syed, Psychiatrist, spoke on 'Major Psychiatric Conditions and Their Medical Treatments'. This session highlighted that many psychiatric conditions have been present for centuries, but their awareness has recently grown due to many prevalent conditions. Dr. Arif touched upon the definitions of the major diagnose-able illnesses in psychiatry including: major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and various anxiety disorders. He also outlined different treatments available for these disorders.

Dr. Farah Islam spoke on 'Mental Health Concerns and Mental Health Service Access Barriers'. This session focused on how young Muslims in Canada today struggle with mental health concerns and face barriers when trying to seek mental health care. Youth living in Peel Region were interviewed to understand the particular challenges faced by Muslim youth in that region. They cited many mental health stressors, from intergenerational and cultural conflict to academic pressure to relationship and financial stress, and family difficulties. These stressors can contribute to mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, drug use with marijuana, alcohol, and cigarette use. Those interviewed were able to identify about a third (36%) of the

mental health resources presented to them and did not feel well-informed about mental health resources available in their neighbourhood. The presentation highlighted youth voices, key issues, and made recommendations.

Shahnaz Ahmed, MSW, RSW (Clinical Social Worker), spoke on 'Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT): Practical Solutions to Day-to-Day'. This session focused on what CBT is: a therapeutic approach that uses a combination of cognitive and behavioural therapy. CBT addresses practical self-help strategies which are based on the assumption that the way people behave is grounded in the way people think. CBT provides a flexible set of clinical tools which include cognitive restructuring, social skills training, relaxation training, problem-solving skills, and self-help manuals. The presentation provided a general overview of the practical application of cognitive and behavioural strategies with emphasis on the application of the problem-solving strategies shown to be effective for a wide range of personal, emotional, and family issues.

Sh. Abdalla Idris Ali, ISNA Canada Executive Director and well known Islamic Scholar, spoke on 'Islamic Perspectives on Community Mental Health Issues and Remedies'. He introduced examples of some pioneering work by prominent Muslim psychologists, particularly, Dr. Malik Badri. His writings related to the role of spirituality in psychological well-being in his famous book titled *Contemplation: An Islamic Psycho-Spiritual Perspective*. Shaykh Abdalla pointed out that seeking help for mental health problems is very much within the framework of Islamic Shari'ah.

In addition to the presentations, a slot of time was set aside for audience interaction through comments and questions. A special highlight of this event was one-on-one sessions between the audience and the professionals. Several tables were set aside for these sessions, well attended and well served.

ISNA Canada is committed to providing resources and services to assist those in our community who suffer from mental health issues. In addition to the first-ever Community Approach to Mental Health workshop, earlier this year, ISNA Canada hired a fully licensed and practicing family counsellor as a free service to the community. Currently, we are setting up a registry of mental health professions, service providers and those needing the service. Those interested, kindly email us at cmhr@isnacanada.com,

VII. ISNA Youth in Action

ISNA Canada has a Youth Engagement Committee (YEC) responsible for planning and implementation of events and activities of interest to the youth and for team building and developing leadership skills in youth. YEC is active in engaging the youth, using the facilities of the ISNA Islamic Centre of Canada (ICC). There is also a large group of youth committed to broaden the scope of youth activities. ISNA Canada President, along with the Executive Director and some members of Board held several meetings with the youth group on their proposed ISNA Canada Youth Plan. As a result of these discussions, the youth have prepared a more detailed revised plan outlining activities over a period of six months in areas of Health & Fitness, Civic Engagement, Spiritual Development, Life Skills, and Academic Excellence. For each area, human resources were identified and an estimated budget was prepared. This plan and

the related budget has been approved by the ISNA Canada Board giving the youth group a green light to move full-steam ahead, utilizing and developing the potential of youth as active players in Muslim community development.

Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA) has operated as an organization within the Islamic Society of North America for over thirty years. MYNA is committed to be the voice for socio-ethical development and serving as drivers of positive change in Muslim communities. MYNA aims at creating educated and skilled leaders.

Present at the meetings with ISNA Youth were also representatives of MYNA. They have expressed their desire to work as a program of ISNA Canada, and presented an action plan accordingly. ISNA Canada has agreed to assist MYNA in achieving their goals.

VIII. ISNA Canada Annual Convention

This year's convention was held at ICC, as it has been the case for the last several years. The convention event is popular. It attracts thousands of participants, making full use of ICC facilities. There is a strong interest to give the Convention a national character beyond GTA. Several other suggestions have also been made such as holding the Convention, possibly jointly with some other organizations, at a larger, more spacious and accessible centre. The 2016 Convention planning is committed to attract both participants and speakers in greater number nationally.

The Convention Committee is moving ahead with preparation for the 2016 Annual Convention. Work is in progress for proposals on the convention theme. All community members are invited to send suggestions for the theme and any special focus sessions or activities that they would like to see at the Convention.

IX. ISNA Canada Halal Certification

The halal certification was a major service activity and substantial source of revenues for ISNA Canada for several years. It got stopped in tracks due to lack of proper management supervision and control. Efforts to restore ISNA Canada halal certification to its rightful place were started many months ago. There is progress being made.

X. ISNA Canada Capacity Building

ISNA Canada has been taking capacity building initiatives, from cultivating principles of sound governance, to provision for professional training, and engaging an increasing number of well-qualified professionals in many areas. Recently the Board appointed a Legal Affairs Committee for the purpose of providing legal advice and policy guidance to the Board in discharging its responsibilities, including matters related to resources, assisting in preparation of briefs for external lawyers or legal counsels, and providing guidance for investigations and inquiries. The Committee consists of registered legal professionals in Canada.

Another committee that has been established is for interfaith relations. Consideration is also being given to forming a government relations committee.

In order to make ISNA Canada financially stronger over the long run, the ISNA Canada Board has also appointed an Investment Committee, both for investing from cash flows and setting aside a percentage of revenues for endowment fund.

XI. ISNA Canada Galaxy of Multifaceted Services to the Community

ISNA Canada is engaged in several community service activities. Some of these activities such as COMPASS with an office at ICC, are open for interactions and services every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This year COMPASS has arranged events such as Safe Home workshop addressing abuse in the home, Volunteer Recruitment, Meet and Greet event, Planting the seeds of Parenthood, and South Asian Women's Health Program and checkups, sponsored by RBC. Examples of other activities, almost one every two weeks are Healthy Living Potluck, Family Fun Day, Doors Open Ontario, and Matrimonial Mixer. Examples of annual events are the Qur'an Competition, Basketball Tournament, Food Bank Fundraising Dinner, the Eid ul Fitr and Eid al Adha Dinners, and the special event of Syrian Refugees Fundraiser. The Food Bank provides food to several hundred needy people every month.

XII. LANTERNS - An Online Publication of ISNA Canada, <http://isnalanterns.com>

Lanterns is a project of ISNA Canada, a grassroots publication supported by volunteers who contribute monthly by editing, copy-editing, writing, providing graphics, pictures, multimedia support and, most importantly, lively and relevant conversation. Lanterns focuses on issues that affect real Canadian Muslims. A lantern represents light and illumination – something people can turn to in darkness. Lanterns brings to light most pressing issues facing the Muslim community. Lanterns invites unique and original content. Lanterns is released on the first Friday of each month and its concept meetings take place on the first Saturday of each month. Lanterns also publishes reviews of books and current events and, on a more lighter side, reviews of popular restaurants serving halal food. Lanterns has published 181 articles, 350 commentaries, 152,422 views with 93,703 visitors. *A Maid, A Babysitter or a Wife* article by Aiman Azlan received 27,000+ views.

Sincerely,



Dr. Syed Imtiaz Ahmad
ISNA Canada President

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