



**ISNA Canada President's Report to the Community**  
March 2015

*Assalamu Alaykum wa Rahmat Allah wa Barakatuh,*

The new Board of the Islamic Society of North America Canada (ISNA Canada) took responsibility early in January of this year after the announcement of election results at the end of December 2014.

In reviewing the state of ISNA Canada's affairs, the Board recognized that major restructuring of ISNA Canada had taken place towards the end of last year. ISNA's role as an umbrella organization for Canadian Islamic Trust Foundation (CITF) and the Islamic Schools Association of Canada (ISAC) was redefined in the light of the new Charities Act of Canada and the audit by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Three separate filings were made with Industry Canada, one for ISNA Canada, and the others for CITF and ISAC which was reformed as ISNA School Board (ISB) — both operating at arm's length from ISNA Canada. The interim amended bylaws of these entities, called continuation documents, defining the new operating framework. Improvements to these bylaws are to be considered this year for final approval by Industry Canada.

ISNA Canada is a prominent Muslim organization that has served Muslims locally in Canada and internationally for over forty years. As such, it is one of the oldest and longest serving national organizations in Canada advancing the Islamic faith. At any given time ISNA Canada provides over thirty (30) different charitable programs. Prior to ISNA Canada being established in the 1980s, the first Muslim Students' Association chapter was established at the University of Toronto. In 1976, the Muslim Students' Association reorganized itself as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). On September 13, 1982, the Canadian branch of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) incorporated under the *Canada Corporations Act*. ISNA Canada received Notice of Registration that it was a registered charity under the *Income Tax Act* (Canada) (the "Act") on August 29, 1983, with an effective date of January 1, 1983. Since its inception, ISNA Canada has provided services to its adherents and the community at large in order to advance the Islamic faith.

1. Study Circles (*halaqas*): Regular weekly (*halaqas*) and classes for the youth and adults since 2007 at the Headquarters, also known as the ISNA Canada Centre (ICC). As an example, in 2013, Qu'ran classes included approximately 200 students.
2. Funeral Services: In 2002, a funeral committee was established by ISNA Canada to provide care and assistance to families in grief. The service has grown with the community and aging population. Services include: bathing (*ghusl*), burial, storage, transportation, hospital care, and prayer services for the deceased. The funeral service team is comprised of highly knowledgeable, motivated and specialized community volunteers and staff.
3. Marriage Services: For couples looking to get married according to Islamic traditions, ISNA Canada offers a full range of marriage ceremony and services to the community including wedding facilities. Related marriage banqueting and catering in the gymnasium and kitchen facilities at the ICC is available. Along with this, an authorized religious scholar (imam) is available to lead the marriage service for the couple and their family, give religious guidance, and witness and solemnize the marriage certification and license process.
4. Food Bank: The ISNA Food Bank program began as a piloted project in late 2009 and has now become established as a full community project serving the needs of those in and around the Greater Toronto Area. The program is managed by a dedicated team of volunteers and receives monetary and food donations from a variety of sources. The food bank operates on the first Saturday of every month from 9 am - 11 am and serves over 540 families each month. Families are able to collect the staple non-perishables (rice, oil, flour, sugar, lentils, chana, pasta, etc) along with specialty items including Halal meat, eggs, carrots, and bread. At the community kitchen patrons of the food bank can relax and enjoy a hot meal while their food basket is being prepared. Open from 10 am to 11 am this community kitchen serves over 500 meals a month to deserving families in our community as well. As a youth-driven initiative, the ISNA Food Bank has also been collecting new unwrapped toys for distribution to local hospitals and families during the Muslim celebration of *Eid*. In 2013, the Food Bank served 6,537 families and 21,236 individuals, approximately 352,217 lbs in food were distributed, and over 300 toys were collected and distributed in 2013.
5. Counselling on Family Issues: For individuals or families experiencing issues relating to interpersonal or domestic matters in the household, scholars at ISNA Canada provide support and guidance to assist with conflicts and finding solutions from an Islamic perspective.

6. ISNA Halal Certification: ISNA Canada is well recognized internationally for the services it has been providing since its inception as the Muslim Students Association of the U.S. and Canada in 1963. Since 1988, ISNA Canada has been providing a Halal Certification Service to Muslim communities not only in Canada and the United States but also throughout the Muslim world.
7. ISNA Canada Convention: Each year ISNA Canada organizes and hosts an annual convention that has a special chosen location, vision and theme. For the past 40 years, the Annual ISNA Canada Convention has been held on Victoria Day's long weekend. Each year different themes are selected to address important issues for Muslims and the community at large. These conventions provide opportunity for community engagement and training in key leadership positions, and continue to produce positive results. In 2014, there were approximately 3,000 attendees at the convention. The Convention includes the annual general membership meeting in which the annual report including the financial statements are presented for approval.
8. Educational Loan Program: The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia developed a scholarship, consisting of an interest free loan program for students entering their first year in undergraduate or graduate university programs. This loan was specifically established for Muslim students that reside in non-Muslim countries. ISNA Canada is able to offer this program in co-operation with IDB. An interest-free loan is provided and each year, the IDB awards a few students the opportunity to continue their post-secondary education by providing a short-term solution to the financial burden of pursuing higher education.
9. Zakat and Fitra: For eligible individuals, ISNA Canada accepts and processes applications for emergency assistance (*Zakat*). The charity regularly disburses money to deserving applicants. In 2013, a number of applicants received *zakat*. *Fitra* funds collected during the month of Ramadan were distributed to various Canadian registered charitable relief organizations.
10. Lanterns Newsletter: In January 2014, ISNA Canada launched an initiative called *ISNA Lanterns*, an electronic newsletter and website, to ensure better communication and feedback to its members and community. The *ISNA Lanterns* online newsletter serves as an extension of its Islamic work in the community across Canada. The publication includes articles written by Muslims of all ages and places of origin, coming together to collaborate in this new opportunity to showcase the thoughts and issues of real Canadian Muslims. The newsletter aims to produce unique and original content that highlights the experiences of Muslims in North America living out their faith.

11. Tours and Educational Seminars: ISNA Canada regularly participates in Doors Open Mississauga that is scheduled in September. Volunteers and ISNA High School students work together in welcoming visitors and accompanying them in guided tours of the ICC facility. The guests learn about the history of the center and its architecture. They also receive information about the Islamic traditions of ablutions, funerals, and prayers. ISNA Canada also hosts, on demand, seminars and workshops dealing with civic, cultural, religious and community matters.
12. ISNA Compass: ISNA Compass is custom designed to be a community information and resource centre. ISNA Compass is both a concept and a physical environment. Conceptually, it is a hub that provides direction to service seekers and bridges the service gap through a network of formal and informal relationships with Muslim and mainstream service organizations in the Greater Toronto Area. In its physical form, the ISNA Compass has a dedicated space and presence at the ICC that is readily accessible. ISNA Canada provides referrals to helpful resources such as newcomer support, child and youth services, mental health services, and senior support services. Additionally ISNA Compass focuses on bringing collaborative events, such as workshops relevant to the needs of the community, as well as trainings for imams, volunteers and staff.
13. Recreational Events: The first matrimonial service event called "Matrimonial Mixer" was launched by ISNA Canada in mid-May 2013 as a feature at the annual convention. The program received encouraging feedback and has been scheduled every quarter since.
14. Family Events: This program was established in January 2009 to provide monthly potluck events that feature lectures, entertainment, religious and health education and the opportunity to socialize with other local community members. They are regularly attended by around 300 community members and predominantly organized by community volunteers. Doctors from the Muslim Medical Association of Canada (MMAC) are invited regularly to give health lectures. The event also showcases youth talent and helps to recruit and groom volunteers in organizing and managing events.

**At its first physical meeting on January 17-18, 2015, the ISNA Canada Board (Majlis) established several committees for steering activities that will serve the ISNA Canada mission effectively and efficiently, involving the widest possible participation of the community, locally and nationally.**

ISNA Canada is inviting the community members to reach out to these committees with their input and suggestions that will further empower these committees in fulfilling the ISNA Canada mission.

Budget and Finance Committee:

Chair, Moin Kermani, Treasurer, Moin@Kermani.net, 514-971-7232

Vice Chair, Hassan Shabbir, hassanshabbir1515@gmail.com, 647-839-0402

Bylaws Committee:

Chair, Dr. Mohamed Bekkari, VP, drmbekkari@yahoo.com, 613-424-2471

Vice Chair, Dr. Afaq Moin, syedafaq.moin@gmail.com, 905-332-5820

Convention Committee:

Chair, Dr. Mohamed Bekkari, VP, drmbekkari@yahoo.com, 613-424-2471

Vice Chair, Chihab Kaab, [chihab@coachchihab.com](http://chihab@coachchihab.com), 416-854-6152

Media & Communications Committee:

Chair, Dr. Syed Imtiaz Ahmad, President, imtiazahmad@rogers.com, 905-583-0404

Vice Chair, Hina Mirza, [hinamirza@hotmail.com](mailto:hinamirza@hotmail.com), 416-700-8450

Membership Committee:

Chair, Khadija Saidi, k.saidi@hotmail.com, 604-377-2793

Vice Chair, Ahmed Shakir Vahed, ahmedsvahed@gmail.com, 905-781-4417

Strategic Planning Committee:

Chair, Dr. Syed Imtiaz Ahmad, President, imtiazahmad@rogers.com, 905-583-0404

Vice Chair, Dr. Afaq Moin, syedafaq.moin@gmail.com, 905-332-5820

Youth Engagement Committee:

Chair, Ahmed Shaker Vahed, ahmedsvahed@gmail.com, 905-781-4417

Vice Chair, Ola Mobarak, ola.mobarak@gmail.com, 647-701-0471

**Following are some highlights of the activities that the committees have been involved. Kindly review these highlights and give us feedback on how we may do more.**

**Convention Committee** has been preparing vigorously for the upcoming ISNA Canada Annual Convention to be held at the ISNA Canada Centre (ICC) on May 15-17, expecting it to be filled with eeman-boosting knowledge and pleasant surprises for the community. The chosen theme of "My Prophet ~ My Beloved - *know him, love him, follow him*" is in response to a deeply felt need to understand Islam, Muslims and the Prophet (peace be upon him). With this in mind, the goal is for each attendee to find themselves in love with the Prophet anew, on a level higher than before, with a thirst to know him more, a desire to be close to him, an active commitment to mirror their character with his, and a consciousness to embody him and all that he represented, as the light which beautifies all their actions, interactions, reactions, and decisions. Some thirty volunteers divided into eight lead groups are engaged in programming and logistics for the Convention. Confirmed prominent speakers include Sheikh Abdalla Idris Ali, Sheikh Alaa Syed, Sheikh Hamid Slimi, Sheikh Daood Butt, Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Imam Siraj Wahaaj, with more as surprises.

**Media and Communications Committee** At its first meeting in January, invited some media specialists for gaining insights on how to communicate with the media. Toronto Star journalist Noor Javed spoke at length on establishing meaningful and effective contacts, especially with the print media. An assistant to a Federal Member of Parliament as well as radio and TV broadcaster Urz Heer provided a really good understanding on dealing with the electronic media, particularly in the context of the mission of ISNA Canada. The presentations were made in the style of an interactive training workshop. The Vice Chair of the Committee, Hina Mirza, had been busy with the media — particularly on some current issues such equitable relationships with politicians in this year of impending Federal elections, and the newly introduced Ontario Government curriculum on sex education in schools. The Committee is now working to streamline its process for press releases and media engagement. Please contact the committee, give them the benefit of your advice, and become involved.

**Membership Committee** with its Chair Khadija Saidi in Vancouver is focusing on events and activities for enrolling new members in BC area, with a view to replicate them in other parts of Canada. Shaykh Abdalla Idris Ali has been invited to Vancouver for speaking on several topics and holding town hall meetings. The Committee believes that online membership will greatly accelerate the process of enrolling new members and automatically build an effective database for membership operations and services. The Committee is also considering some novel approaches for building membership, and is also working on a response to the question of the value or benefit that a membership provides. Currently, a member participates in electing ISNA Canada leadership, stands for leadership positions after one year of membership, receives updates on ISNA Canada events and activities and receives a complimentary copy the annual Hijra calendar as well as the Annual Report, gets a discount of more than 10% in registration fee

for the national annual convention and regional conferences, and 5% discount on purchases at the ISNA Bookstore.

**Strategic Planning Committee** has held two teleconference meetings and one physical meeting focused on creating a shared vision for the process to be used in developing a strategic plan of action for ISNA Canada reflective of the needs and aspirations articulated by the stakeholders including ISNA Canada members, community members at large, scholars and leaders (imams), volunteers, elected officials, and staff. Through deliberations, the Committee has agreed on a structured/tiered approach in seeking input in the planning process. A list of stakeholders has been compiled for the purpose of surveys and analysis of ISNA Canada's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats (SWOT). An initial tooling process has been conducted by performing SWOT analysis within the Committee. At the same time, the Committee is extending an open invitation to those who would like to participate in the stakeholders' surveys. SWOT analysis results will be reviewed at a workshop of some fifty representative sample of stakeholders, leading to identification of goals for ISNA Canada development, objectives to be achieved within each goal, and applicable strategies to be used. Out of it will emerge a forceful action plan for ISNA Canada with activities, events, and services in line with its vision and mission.

**Youth Engagement Committee** has been playing an active role to engage young Muslims, both male and female, to get involved as volunteers in events and activities organized by ISNA Canada, giving them an opportunity to gain experience in community work, and prepare themselves to play leading roles in the community, locally and nationally, with their youthful energy and new ideas. The Committee invites youth of all ages to come forward and join hands in identifying issues that they consider important, and contribute with their ideas, knowledge and skills.

**ISNA Canada Board of Directors (Majlis):** The Majlis is responsible for overall management of the corporation through policy decisions and directives, and appointment of working committees, including an Executive Committee for implementation of its policies and directives. The Majlis reviews and approves the annual budget as recommended to it by the Budget and Finance Committee and the Executive Committee. The Majlis also reviews and approves corporate financial statements required by the regulatory agencies. As reported earlier, all the Committees have been appointed and already engaged in responsibilities assigned to them, except the standing committees, which will become operative at appropriate time according to their mandate.

Like other organizations, ISNA Canada has been dealing with some thorny issues that by their very nature cause pain and take time to resolve. Most of these issues stem from past abuses that occurred in the organization and were discovered in audits both by ISNA Canada and CRA. Lack of concern for corporate well being led to contentions often involving legal recourses. Both the Majlis and the Executive Committee are fully engaged in resolving these issues as best as they can be resolved and as early as they can be resolved.

The key staff at ISNA Canada consists of the Executive Director Shaykh Abdalla Idris Ali, [ed@isnacanada.com](mailto:ed@isnacanada.com), the Director of Operations, Sr. Seema Khan, [operations@isnacanada.com](mailto:operations@isnacanada.com), and the Director of Accounting & Finance, Shameem Mohammed, [finance@isnacanada.com](mailto:finance@isnacanada.com).

Sincerely,



Dr. Syed Imtiaz Ahmad

*President*

ISNA - Canada

[president@isnacanada.com](mailto:president@isnacanada.com)