

# Reflections

Myfyrdodau  
Myllyrddodau

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## Opening Message from the Secretary General:

Alhumdulillah, Praise be to Allah SWT and peace and mercy upon His Prophet Muhammed (SAW) and all the prophets He has sent.

It is indeed a great pleasure to see the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of 'Reflections' hot off the press. I hope and pray it will be a quarterly newsletter connecting the people of Wales with the latest news and activities initiated not only by Muslim Council of Wales but by the Muslim community at large.

A lot is happening around Wales and indeed the world, and we have tried to bring these issues to the forefront in 'Reflections'. This is not an easy task but we feel it is of great importance that in this newsletter we bring these important matters to the attention of our community so that we continue to be engaged in our civic duties and responsibilities.

I hope the readers will be informed and will indeed reflect and write about how they wish to determine the course of our future as Welsh Muslims.

May Allah SWT guide us, guard us and protect us.

Enjoy!

*Saleem Kidwai*



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## Letter from the Editor:

'Reflections' is the 1<sup>st</sup> newsletter produced by the Muslim Council of Wales and aims to encompass the thoughts, reflections and achievements of the Muslim Community in Wales.

Through the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of 'Reflections', we aim to highlight the importance of the ongoing "Yes for Wales" and "Census" campaigns, both crucially important for Muslims to get involved in and participate to secure a stronger future for Wales. We also review our past and future activities, highlighting a new MCW initiative, "ADFYWIAD". Lastly, we explore the ongoing Middle East revolution that has had us all gripped for months and while we watch the series of events unfold on our TV screens, let us not forget to pray for the victory of our fellow brothers and sisters, for justice and for the removal of their oppressors. We must remember that Allah SWT, the most perfect, the most high has made us helpers towards each other; the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said

"The example of the believers in their mutual love and mercy is like the example of a body. If one part feels pain, then all of it is affected by sickness and fever" - Bukhari, Muslim

The Muslim Council of Wales has always worked hard to build new partnerships and maintain established friendships. We hope we can continue to work in collaboration and union with many different societies and organisations in the near future to foster and nurture a better society and community for all. 'Reflections' is just one means of doing that and for us to reflect on our united common goals.

We pray you enjoy the series of newsletters and if you would like to contribute in any way, please feel free to get in touch with us at [info@muslimcouncilwales.org](mailto:info@muslimcouncilwales.org)

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## A Stronger Voice for Wales—Vote “Yes for Wales” on 3rd March

*“A Yes vote is incredibly important as it will enact changes that will affect generations to come” –  
Matthew McDonald (NMNW)*

The Muslim Council of Wales has officially joined the Yes for Wales campaign.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March, the people of Wales will have the choice to vote on the future of the National Welsh Assembly.

Currently, the law making decisions made by the Welsh Assembly are still subject to approval by Westminster. This process is long, convoluted and costly. Any decision still requires approval from the House of Commons, House of Lords and the Secretary of State for Wales. Such impediments sap at the resources of an over-stretched government, and hinder the ability of the Welsh Assembly to make the right decisions for Wales in an efficient and effective way.

A ‘yes’ vote in the referendum will mean that approval from Westminster will no longer be needed, and strengthen the Welsh voice and the Welsh Assembly, bringing it to the same level as Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The Muslim Council of Wales, after consultation with Welsh Islamic organisations and community leaders, found that a ‘yes’ vote was widely supported by Muslims.

Matthew McDonald, part of the New Muslim Network Wales and involved in the Muslims Say Yes campaign argued that “a Yes vote is incredibly important as it will enact changes that will affect generations to come. Our youth are the most important benefactors of a Yes vote, as devolved areas such as education and healthcare will invariably have implications for their future; it’s time to remove the red tape and bureaucracy”.

Mohsin Malik, Chair of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies in Wales, also agreed. “I’ve seen the campaigning and concerns of Muslims students in Wales regarding

tuition fees. Many Muslim students whose parents were poor or from a working class background said they would not have been able to come to University without the Assembly’s grant towards the fees. There was genuine relief when the Assembly chose to continue subsidising tuition fees for Welsh students”.

The ability of the Welsh Assembly to take a different path from Westminster, one right for Wales, is essentially what this referendum is all about. I’ll definitely be voting Yes”.

The feeling was strong also in educational charities, such as the School of Basic Islamic Studies (SOBIS), which runs a complementary educational syllabus.

Nausheen Lal, a teacher and trustee of SOBIS felt that the “a devolved Assembly really helped SOBIS. We have AMs who recognise our work, attend our functions and appreciate the role we play in creating a strong community. I trust these AMs to understand the challenges faced by the Muslim community, and of course the wider community of Wales, better than the House of Commons or an unelected House of Lords”.

The referendum takes place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March, polling information will be sent to homes in advance.

The Muslim Council of Wales encourages all to ensure they go out and vote ‘Yes’ to secure a stronger future for Wales.

### FACT BOX:

- A referendum asks you to vote “yes” or “no” to a proposal
- On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, a referendum will be held in Wales about the law-making powers of the National Assembly for Wales, and all Welsh domiciles can vote.
- A ‘Yes’ vote will mean that law-making decisions by the Welsh Assembly no longer need to go through Westminster before being approved – a process that cost hundreds of thousands of pounds and can take up to 3 years. The Assembly will be able to make laws on all of the following subject areas:
  - Agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
  - Ancient monuments and historical buildings
  - Culture
  - Economic development
  - Education and training
  - The environment
  - Fire and rescue services and promotion of fire safety
  - Food
  - Health and health services
  - Highways and transport
  - Housing
  - Local government
  - The national assembly for Wales
  - Public administration
  - Social Welfare
  - Sport and recreation
  - Tourism
  - Town and country planning
  - Water and flood defence
  - The Welsh language
- A ‘No’ vote keep the current system in place unchanged.
- All four political parties in Wales support the ‘Yes’ vote. The Muslim Council of Wales is also in support of a ‘Yes’ vote.

## Be counted - Census 2011, 27 March '11

*“Wales is a vibrant, multicultural and multifaith community, and it is vital that the national government and the Welsh Assembly can see this in the census figures” – Saira Chaudhry (MCW)*

On the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011, the United Kingdom National Census will be taking place. The census, which occurs every ten years, is an important tool for understanding the social and societal constitution of Britain today. It guides politicians, policy-makers and academics in their analysis of Britain.

Saleem Kidwai, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Wales explained that “the number of Muslims in the UK is difficult to establish, but we are confident that the last census underestimated the Muslim population. We believe this is because many felt concerned about stating their religious affiliation and how this data would be used.”

In 2001, the census added a question on religion for the first time.

He continued “I think however that in the last ten years, the government has proven to us that it will treat the religious information in the census sensitively and with the utmost privacy.”

The census is important because it helps the government assess its services and policies, helping make sure we get the services we need in our community. It is thus important that the number of Muslims in Wales, and the UK, is an accurate reflection of the population.

Saira Chaudhry, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Wales believes that “Wales is a vibrant, multicultural and multifaith community, and it is vital that the national government and the Welsh Assembly can see this in the census figures. The Muslim community in

Wales is centuries old, not decades, and have actively contributed to society for such a long time. Recognising the number of British Muslims is the first step to recognising the invaluable contribution of Muslims to civic, public and social life in Wales.”

Completion of the National Census is required by law, with a potential fine of £1,000 for failure to complete it.

This year it is possible to complete the census questionnaire online in advance of the 27<sup>th</sup> March. If assistance is required, there is a helpline number that can offer advice and guidance in over 50 languages.

The Muslim Council of Wales also has volunteers on hand to assist that can visit and help those who request, and who will be touring mosques throughout March.

**The Muslim Council of Wales encourages all to ensure they've filled in the Census, and importantly indicate their faith when completing the form.**

### **FACT BOX:**

- The National Census takes place every ten years. The next date is 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011.
- The census gives a high quality estimate of the make up of the Britain.
- The census influences government policies. The government decides how best to plan, fund and deliver the everyday services we all need – like housing, education, healthcare and transport
- This year, the census can be completed online at <http://2011.census.gov.uk/>
- It is required by law to complete the census, with a fine of £1,000 for failure to do so.
- The Muslim Council of Wales believes the 2001 census underestimated the number of Muslims in Wales, and so the Muslim population was underrepresented in decisions about Wales.
- If you require help in completing the census, you can ring the census helpline number (which will be released on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2011 on <http://2011.census.gov.uk/>) or request help from the team of volunteers from the Muslim Council of Wales.



## Historic Event Feature

# When Muslims helped Jews to escape from the Nazi Holocaust

An extraordinary and largely forgotten piece of history was commemorated on 26<sup>th</sup> January, when two Welsh communities came together to hear about a group of Muslims who rescued Jews from Nazi persecution.

*"One of the most extraordinary acts of humanitarianism seen anywhere in wartime Europe – the rescue of 2,000 Jews from Nazi persecution by a group of Albanian Muslims"*  
– Western Mail

It was seen as an historic occasion aimed at creating greater understanding between adherents of the two faiths in Wales. The event brought together the Muslim Council of Wales, the Exploring Islam Foundation, the Cardiff University Islamic Society and the Cardiff University Jewish Society to host the event in Cardiff.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2011 had the theme of 'Untold Stories'. To compliment the theme, the event was titled 'Missing Pages', retelling the story of Muslim Albanians who sheltered and protected Jews during World War II.

The story was told by Norman Gershman, a photographer who travelled to Albania, taking photographs of the Muslims involved in the rescue, and collecting their stories. He said: "When I first learned of the World War II rescue of Jews in Muslim Albania and Kosovo my reaction was visceral. Muslims who saved Jews? I must record this forgotten event with my camera and tell the story through the various family histories I was to meet."

The lecture explored how Besa, an Albanian code-of-honour, wove into the Quranic moral teachings, to propel ordinary people into heroic acts of bravery. Norman Gershman's book 'Besa' has already been published, and a documentary based on his journey is in production.

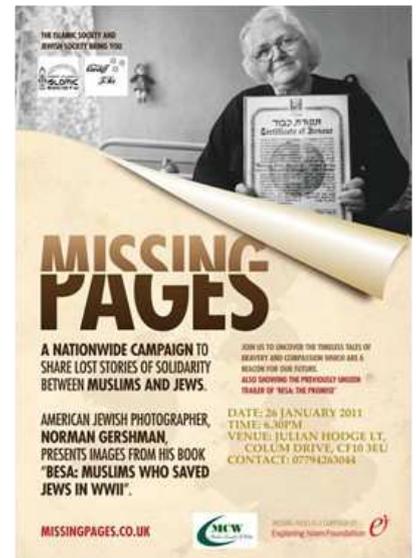
Remona Aly, Campaigns director of the Exploring Islam Foundation, which is helping promote Gershman's book across the country, said: "We want to show how Islam promotes diversity and co-existence and has no tolerance of anti-semitism. The message of this project is more vital now than ever before. Tensions in the Middle East need to be separated from the common shared theological heritage and values of the two faiths, and history of peace and solidarity between Islam and Judaism"

The Muslim Council of Wales were excited at the opportunity of working with the Jewish community, retelling a tale of solidarity and friendship. Although it has worked with the Jewish community in the past through the Three Faiths Forum and various interfaith events, 'Missing Pages' marks a new chapter

in cooperation that it hopes to continue in the future.

Abdullah al-Mullah of the Cardiff University Islamic Society, and one of the main organisers of the event, felt that "it was a huge success; the turnout was great and very varied, with Muslims and Jews, reflecting the appeal and the importance of the story".

Asked why he organised the event, he responded that "interfaith, and working together, is really needed today. It breaks down misconceptions held between communities. I think faith groups, if they work together, can tackle many social ills. I hope that by organising this event, I brought the Muslim and Jewish communities together and established a friendship that will last for a very long time".



*"Interfaith, and working together, is really needed today. It breaks down misconceptions held between communities. I think faith groups, if they work together, can tackle many social ills"*  
– Abdullah Al – Mullah (CUIS)



## A New MCW Initiative

*"Adfwyiad is certainly one of the Muslim Council of Wales most dynamic and beneficial projects, the community have responded fantastically so far and I look forward to seeing how the project develops in the next few months" – Saleem Kidwai (MCW)*

Over the past year, the Muslim Council of Wales has been involved in the delivery of ground-breaking governance and child-protection training to mosques across Wales.

The training is funded and delivered by ADFYWIAD, a new Muslim Council of Wales initiative. ADFYWIAD stands for "Advisory Directorate for Youth, Women and Imams Active Development" and is also the Welsh word for "Revival". ADFYWIAD hopes to deliver capacity building and leadership skills to mosques, as well as women and the youth, within the Muslim community in Wales. It aims to engage and empower individuals and groups of youth, women and Imams in different skill areas required for the successful running of any project or organisation.

So far, all mosques in the South Wales area, and one in the north of Wales, have received the training.

As well as governance and management training, child protection training was also delivered. These are considered increasingly impor-

tant, not only to meet government regulations, but also to ensure the safety of the children and integrity of the mosque youth and educational activities.

Several more training sessions in the north and mid Wales are being planned, as well as expanding the range of training offered to include First Aid, Health and Safety.

To compliment the activities aimed at mosques and Imams, there are also a number of innovative projects being developed aimed at Muslim women and the youth. One such initiative, developed by ADFYWIAD includes iLead Wales, which stands for "Islamic Leadership Education and Development Wales" and whose primary strategy is to train and develop a team of competent youth in leadership and project management. The vision is set for harbouring the creation of a platform for young Muslims to launch themselves as leaders of specialist projects and communities.

Alaa Khundakji, responsible for the iLead Wales project explains that "iLead Wales is a project

aimed at giving young people, from 13 up, the skills needed to make not only themselves successful, but their communities as well." The project will include weekend retreats, an Apprentice-styled social enterprise competition, and a launch event to bring the ideas to the community. When asked what she hopes will emerge from the

iLead Wales training project, Alaa replied "a stronger Wales, one in which everyone contributes to making Wales and the wider world a better place."

The iLead Wales launch event will take place on 26<sup>th</sup> February at the Future Inn Hotel where attendees will have the opportunity to have a taste of the iLead programme, including workshops, talks and discussions evolved around leadership and management skills.

Saleem Kidwai, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Wales, felt that "Adfwyiad is certainly one of the Muslim Council of Wales most dynamic and beneficial projects, the community have responded fantastically so far and I look forward to seeing how the project develops in the next few months".

To receive a copy of the iLead brochure, please email [info@muslimcouncilwales.org.uk](mailto:info@muslimcouncilwales.org.uk)



### **ILEAD WALES FACT BOX:**

The purpose of iLead's core programme is:

- To develop leaders who can transform communities.
- To provide enlightened, educated, ethical, and motivated community leaders from varied backgrounds.
- To encourage and empower people to collaborate and work together to build solutions, and strengthen communities, and move toward a shared vision of an inclusive community.
- To develop the next generation of community leaders to become active builders and sustainers, shaping a strong multicultural Wales.



## A new beginning....

### ...A tale of a revolution

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011. The beginning of a new era for the Egyptian nation. Some have called it unrest, a crisis, others have called it a challenge, but there is no doubt that after what has happened in recent weeks that this is indeed the start of a revolution. The day Hosni Mubarak resigned as president. The moment that people eventually felt they can dream again and have hopes of a new and refreshing start for the



development of their country.

Nearly a month prior to this, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned following 28 days of protests in Tunisia. The protests were sparked by the self immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in December. Bouazizi was a street vendor, who had repeatedly been harassed by local police officers, regularly confiscating his goods. After attempting to put forward a complaint at the governor's office, he was refused even to be seen or listened to by the governor, resulting in the tragic incident that led to the development of protests throughout Tunisia. People came out in their thousands, expressing their objections to and dissatisfaction with high unemployment, lack of freedom of speech, corruption and poor living conditions.

Inspired by the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia, the uprising made people realise that they, as average citizens of their country can have a significant impact on its functioning and consequently have realised their own abilities to affect change and progression in their own countries. This revolution, dubbed as 'Revolution of the

Youth', or the '25<sup>th</sup> January Revolution', began as an initiative of the youth of Egypt, but slowly started to expand and bring in Egyptians from all walks of life, the young and the elderly, the Muslim and Christian, people living in shanty towns and people living in upper class Egypt, as well as various political factions and movements.

Whether it be high unemployment rates, rising food prices or the simple fact of not being able to express one's opinions and emotions freely without having to face severe repercussions, there is clearly a host of factors that led to the millions leaving their homes and marching in the districts of Egypt. Each one of them may have had their own personal motives for joining the protests, but one thing for sure that united them all is the hope for a new Egypt, for change and for freedom.

To remind ourselves of the reasons behind recent events, let us take an example of an average Egyptian man on the street, AbdelSattar, a 50 year old government office worker. He has 4 children, three of whom are of school age. He earns 300 Egyptian pounds a month (that is approximately £30 Sterling pounds). Supposedly this is sufficient to cover all necessary costs including food, electricity and water bills, rent, travel, and education (i.e. private lessons as the education system in Egypt has failed to deliver any teaching/education/learning opportunities of an adequate level). Realistically, if this man and his children were to live on 1 basic meal a day for the duration of a month, based on food prices in Egypt, it would leave with him very little to spend on other aspects of daily life.

Another example is that of a 24 year old business graduate, from a middle class background who has been struggling to find a job where he can put his degree to use. Why? The education provided to him simply spoon fed him and did

not allow him to develop any means of critical thinking or assist him in creating and developing his own ideas. This young man will also have found it very difficult to gain other necessary skills and requirements in order to obtain a job. He knows very well even if he did have these requirements, unless he used bribes and had good connections, that gave him opportunities based on favouritism rather than merit, (otherwise known as a waste in Arabic) he would have very little chance of gaining employment. With little opportunities available to them and restricted avenues through which they can develop themselves to be of any benefit to their communities, these young people had become wasted talent. It is these young people that represent over two thirds of the country's population. These young people have had the energy, passion, enthusiasm, initiative and creativity, that unfortunately has not been put to use in any beneficial way for their country or indeed for themselves.

During the 18 day process, we witnessed scenes that some of us have never seen before, nor would have imagined taking place in a land where many thought all hope was lost and the status quo had



remained well grounded for such a long time, that there was little chance of change ever occurring. To a certain degree some had even become so 'comfortable', accepting the situation, that their apathy led them to believe change was highly unlikely if not near impossible.

We watched on our screens as

protesters prayed in unison, defying the harsh attempts of water cannons to disperse them. We saw Christians guarding Muslims during their prayers and sheikhs and priests standing side by side united for one cause. We were inspired when a mass of protesters were so defiant that they caused the police force, in all its apparent might and glory, to retract on itself, determined to achieve their goal regardless of what the opposing force or resistance is.



We learnt about the creation of neighbourhood committees, formed to protect themselves and their families, when looters descended upon the many regions of Egypt. It was a moment when everyone had a role to play, even the housewives who took it in turns to cook for the local families and the young men who assigned each other shifts for the protection of their local community. The degree of organisation and discipline was little more than impressive. To put this in perspective, we are talking about communities where arguments and quarrels were a common scene, where people were disgruntled with one another, in a community where the 'I' had become the priority and the concept of 'we' had little, if any, significance.

However, reform does not come without a price. Amongst those who sacrificed their souls for the sake of their nation are more than 360 people, many of whom were young people, protesting out on the streets for their basic human rights. Thousands who have been injured in the clashes and violence that erupted during the process will bear the scars that will forever

remind them of the time they decided to do something for their country and bear the brunt of responsibility on their shoulders.

Amongst the key lessons learnt from recent events is people's increased awareness of their rights and how to obtain them. They have become aware of their own abilities and the impact they can have when they become united. People have witnessed that they can become the change they want to see; they initiated

and contributed towards amendments that are now being made, that only a few months ago would have been deemed unimaginable. They are not prepared to go back to their previous state and are now looking forward in terms of what practical steps need to be taken to start the redevelopment stage and rectify the damage that has been building up over the past decades. They realise that all the feelings of passion, enthusiasm, sense of ownership and responsibility towards their country that have been developed now need to be channelled and guided in the right direction to allow for sustainable, positive change to take place.

The key question is what happens next? The recent events are only



the beginning of a potential era of change. Certain changes that were demanded have already been implemented, such as the suspension of the current constitution and the dissolving of both parliaments. In terms of the protestors' calls, there are demands that are yet to be met, including free and fair elections, the release of political

prisoners and scrapping the emergency law that has for decades prevented people from speaking out against the regime and has enabled the government to arrest and charge any citizen without evidence and for unlimited periods of time. However, the process for



social and economic reform is still in its early stages and will require substantial amounts of time, effort and expertise before we start to witness concrete sustainable change.

It blossomed in Tunisia, developed in Egypt and the contagious outcome of the revolution continues like a domino effect across neighbouring Arab regions. We have recently seen Algerians who took to their streets in their thousands. An apparent unlikely candidate amongst Mideast revolutions, Libya has shocked many with masses marching in the streets of Ben Ghazi and Tripoli. Protests have also started in Yemen and Jordan and the world is watching closely as events begin to unravel in the Middle East. All are calling for freedom of speech, better living conditions and an end to outright corruption that has become the accepted norm and way of life in many of these countries.

The potential within each and every individual has always been there, but just awaiting the right time and opportunity. And given the opportunity there is a lot to hope on that it is these very individuals that led on this uprising who will be the ones that continue to take their countries forward, whether it be in Tunisia or Egypt, and with potential of neighbouring Arab regions soon to follow.

A lesson we can all learn from... through working in unison and a united common goal, we can build a better society and community for all.

## End Note

**""And hold fast to the rope of God, all of you together, and be not divided amongst yourselves"" – Qu'ran**

*When the sand grains unite they become a vast desert.*

*When the sea drops unite they become a boundless ocean.*

*The conglomeration of stars in the firmament of sky soothes our eyes.*

*The seven colours emerge in the shape of a bewitching rainbow.*

***The unity of people makes an invincible strong nation.***

This is the reason Islam lays great stress on the importance of unity. The Qu'ran states **"And hold fast to the rope of God, all of you together, and be not divided amongst yourselves"**. The Islamic concept of Tawhid is the other name of the unity of humankind. The corner stone in Islam is the unity of God. Islam teaches us the message that we should not divide humans into sections and sects. Islam is a religion to all humans regardless of color, race and

language. It is a religion that tolerates other religions and orders its followers to respect and protect all humans.

According to a saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) all persons belong to Adam and Adam was from soil. The racial discrimination has been strictly prohibited in Islam. In the last sermon from the Mount of Arafat the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) had clearly announced that **"no Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab; or the white over the black"**. Islam gives clear injunctions for the respect, safety, security and prosperity of the non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Unity teaches peace, equality and paternity. The absence of unity brings and breeds disruption, devastation and disputes. Islam ordains protection of non-Muslims simply to show the respect for the Canons of divinity and humanity. The unity of all humans is the ultimate aim of the teachings of Islam.

And on that note, the Muslim Council of Wales looks forward to working in collaboration with many different communities in the near future, to foster and nurture a better society and commit to playing a part in creating a Wales that is a beacon of acceptance, openness, friendship and community.