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Title: Meeting with Dr. Sālim Sālim ‘Abd al-Jalīl, Deputy Minister of Al-Awqaf for Da‘wah, on Mosque Building
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In an effort to further the research of Arab West Report on the subject of legal guidelines for building mosques, on April 19, 2010, we interviewed Dr. Sālim ‘Abd al-Jalīl, Deputy Minister of Endowments for Da‘wah at the Religious Endowments Ministry. We asked him several questions, concerning the Ministry’s zeal in following the ten conditions for the construction of mosques, the responsible parties in financing the building of mosques, the management of the mosques, and the preparation of Imams.

Dr. Sālim received a Ph.D. from the Azhar in 2001. After graduating, he worked as Imam in private mosques from 1986 to 1990, and has since been employed by public mosques.

He is the founder and director of the Islamic Center at Qāhir Al-Tatar Mosque in Heliopolis, which organizes numerous activities such as the clubs for children and youth, a computer skills center, a Qur’ānic school, and literacy classes. He also appears frequently on satellite religious programming, such as al-Azharī Channel, al-Rahma, and Iqra’.

We spoke with him about numbers and procedures for mosque building. There are about 105,000 mosques in Egypt, including about 30,000 zāwiyah, which are small mosques opened for all prayers except the Friday

prayer, due to the lack of an official imams from the Azhar. The number of imams, however, is only around 50,000; as a consequence, several mosques are not opened for Friday prayer as well.

The Endowments Ministry deals with this deficit through financial inducement to serve as an imam. Appointees are usually either from the Azhar University or Institutes, or else graduates from Islamic Cultural Centers established by the ministry.

Similarly, Mr. Usāmah, director of the Institute for the Preparation of Preachers at al-Nūr Mosque,¹ spoke of two kinds of institutions for the preparation of preachers, managed by the Endowments Ministry: Islamic Institutes, responsible for the training of graduates from the Azhar to become official imams at mosques, and the Islamic Cultural Centers, responsible for religious education for the public. However, all graduates from any university can study all Islamic subjects at these centers for two years (religious rites, jurisprudence, religious law, Hadith, and Qur'ān). There are three conditions to apply: university diploma, official registration and presentation of documents (ID, birth certificate, and certificate of graduation), successful examination on at least five of the thirty parts of the Qur'ān.

In this context, Dr. Sālim mentioned two issues that the Endowments Ministry has to face. First, he discussed the 30,000 imams who are not registered at the ministry. These receive no wage from the government, are not able to be trained due to lack of resources, and give sermons

¹ A meeting with the Director of The Institute for the Preparation of Preachers at Al-Nour Mosque in April 26, 2010 on "Mosque Building".

independently. He added that is difficult to shape their thoughts by either binding regulations or by persuasion.

The second issue regards mosques managed by Ansār Al-Sunnah Associations. These associations build mosques, promote education and the call to God, and provide social welfare. These are not managed by the Endowments Ministry, but by jama'iyah shara'iyah, which supervises these associations in building mosques and preparing imams, albeit according to their own particular orientations. He mentioned that these orientations are sometimes extreme and have resulted in sectarian clashes.

As for the preparation of imams, Dr. Sālim explained that candidates are appointed and trained by the Endowments Ministry after their graduation. In order to be nominated as an imam, graduates from the Azhar have to pass exams conducted by the ministry. Their training phase takes place under the responsibility of ministry as well in terms of content, but is financed by the Ministry of State for Administrative Development.

Dr. Sālim, as a Deputy Minister of Endowments for Da'awa, prefers to build only one mosque in each district. He defined the classification of mosques as public or private according to its management. Consequently, if the mosque is managed by the ministry, regardless of how it is funded, it is considered as a public mosque. Otherwise, it is a private mosque. So if a mosque is erected through private Muslim initiative in real estate, construction, and finance, but its management is transferred to the ministry, it is a public mosque, even if it was privately funded. The Endowment Ministry maintains an annual budget for the annexation of three thousand mosques.

Dr. Sālim also commented on the proposed Draft for the Unified Law for Building Houses of Worship.² He is completely against this draft law, because, in his opinion, it is inappropriate to apply a unified law on two different types of religious constructions. Whereas the Endowment Ministry is responsible for mosque building, it does not have jurisdiction over church building. In his opinion, this is the reason why it is still nothing more than a draft under Parliamentary examination.

His suggestion is to issue two separate laws, one for mosques, the other for churches, in order to ensure that each law respects the specific needs of each group. The ministry should be responsible for mosque building, while a Christian body should deal church building. Yet, according to Mrs. Sawsan Jabrah Ayyūb Khalīl, co-founder of Arab–West Report, there is no

² **Article 1:** It is permissible to establish, elevate, expand, strengthen or renovate the houses of worship by permission from the competent administrative body.

Article 2: It is permissible to give a license to build house of worship neither above an existing building which is used for other purposes nor changing the usage of this building to become a house for worship partially or totally.

Article 3: To apply for a license for any of the actions which set out in the first Article of this law from the competent religious body which prepared for that, accompanied by the title of the land on which the requested license, the contract of the payment of fees which shall not exceed two thousand pounds, and the documents and statements which prescribed by the executive regulation.

Article 4: After preparing of the required surveys and poll of the competent security agencies, the competent administrative body has to check the application for license within a period which not exceeding four months since the date of the presenting of the compatible application with the conditions. If it comes to the request of renovation or strengthen of the houses of worship, it has to check the application within a period which not exceeding two months.

Article 5: The competent governor is supposed to take the decision concerning the construction of the houses of worship, and the expiration of the period which was referred to in the forth Article of this Act without the issuance of a reasoned decision of non-accepted request by the expiration of the period which was referred to in the seventh Article of this Act from the competent administrative body is considered as an acceptance on the application for the license of the construction. And in case of refusal, the competent body sends approved decision for it, so, the applicant may appeal this refusal before the competent court.

Article 6: The Administration Jurisdiction Court (alone) is responsible for deciding appeals on all issued decisions in accordance with the provisions of this Act and the problems of the implementation of these decisions or the provisions which are issued for it.

Article 7: It has to establish a department in the Supreme Administrative Court to be (alone) responsible for the adjudication in all appeals on the provisions of the administrative jurisdiction courts which are related to the decisions of the construction of the houses of worship, expand, elevate, expand, strengthen or renovate it.

Article 8: It has to apply the provisions of the Article 22 in the Act No.106 of 1976 on anyone who commits one of the violations which are stipulated in the law for the houses of worship.

specialized body responsible for church-building so each bishop determines local needs for his area.

Finally, Dr. Sālim commented on the application of the ten conditions for mosques building³ as they have been formulated by the Endowment Ministry. He stressed the fact that the ministry only has the right to give license to build a mosque in accordance with these conditions, but does not have the right to demolish mosques that violate them. If the mosque is built in conformity with the conditions, the ministry is responsible for its management. If not, there are specific procedures. First, the mosque builder asks the ministry for assistance, and the ministry transfers the request to Dār al-Iftā', and then to the Executive Agency. Dār al-Iftā', takes the suitable decision to preserve society's interests, which is then carried out by the

³The ten conditions:

- (1) The land on which the mosque is to be built should not be a subject of conflicts or illegally owned.
- (2) The distance between any two mosques has not to be less than 500 meters.
- (3) A mosque should only be built in an area that really needs it.
- (4) The mosque should be built only by permission from the Endowments Ministry.
- (5) Mosques are not permitted to be built under residential buildings.
- (6) The Irrigation Ministry has to approve the construction of the mosque if it is close to the Nile River.
- (7) The land surface of the mosque has not to be less than 175 square meters.
- (8) The designs which are made by Al-Awqaf Ministry for Mosque construction must be applied.
- (9) There has to be built social and health activities floor under the mosque.
- (10) The donator of the mosque building must pay fifty thousand pounds as a down payment.

Executive Agency. Furthermore, although the Endowment Ministry is not responsible for the construction of public utilities such as schools or hospitals, its advice can be sought. For example, if there are fifteen mosques in a certain village, it would be a priority to build schools or other public institutions rather than more mosques, and the ministry would state this clearly.

In conclusion, this informative interview is helpful for any researcher seeking knowledge about the construction of mosques. Conducting research is worthwhile; the hardest task is to find truthful and reliable sources. We are glad that Dr. Sālim proved himself to be so.



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