

PROJECT ON BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Report on Europe and Americas

Fourth Quarterly Report on Europe and Americas

October to December 2008

Principal Investigator: Prof. Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani

Contributor

Bakare Najimdeen

Snr Research Associate

**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD**

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Fourth Quarterly Report on Europe and Americas

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**Department of Politics and International Relations
International Islamic University Islamabad**

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Reports for the period **October to December 2008**

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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: October 7, 2008

**North/West, South Europe, Russia and Its Neighbours, Oceania, South,
Caribbean, Central and North America plus Canada**

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 28th September-4th October 2008

Russia and its Neighbours

This part of the world is witnessing a new era, an era characterized by the economic, military and political turnaround in Russia. Russia being the major supplier of energy to Europe has been under criticism of the European Community for politicizing its energy. Russia although dismisses that assertion rather believes the Europeans are not that interested in seeing a new power like Russia in their neighbourhood. Obviously without doubt Russia has maintained an unprecedented economic recovery under President Putin. It has also increased in multilateral relations across the globe and many not just in Europe opined that Russia is aimed at regaining its position before the end of the Cold War.

The turnaround of structures in Russia and its new face has further brought Russia at loggerhead with its archrival, the United States. Both of these countries have witnessed several form of face-off though not in the shape of the Cold War among which was the dragging issue of Russia membership of the World Trade Organization and interference in pro-Western countries in the neighbourhood.

Economic front

Russia has grown economically through its energy position as the major supplier of energy to Europeans and its neighbours. It has entered into several bilateral and multilateral co-operations with its neighbours in Central Asia, although there are challenges faced by Russia in all of these external relations. In view of Russia economic power it has been able to challenge, monitor and manage the affairs around its sphere. Many countries within the neighbourhood feel threatened by the economic pressure within the reach of Russia. Countries like Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and even some in Central Asia have clamoured against the economic threat of Russia. This fear is equally nurtured by the European community.

Political Front

Russia under Putin is rated to have advanced, though Europeans and the Americans believe democracy is yet to have a fruitful stay in that country, as the country still

experience political closeness. The meddling in Russia affairs by foreign powers has brought more confrontation with Russia. Prime Minister Putin in today's Russia is seen as a powerhouse of the country even before he left the office of the presidency. Many in Russia believe new President Medvedev is a stooge of Putin. Nevertheless one can still see the power being flexed by Putin within Russia and in foreign policy issues.

Strategic Front

Russia in the recent times wants to rebuild its alliance with those countries that still maintain friendship or sympathy for Russia, thus Russia is ready to spread its military assistance to these countries. Russia is particularly looking at South America and Venezuela is one of those countries availing the Russian military relations. Iran although in nuclear impasse with the western countries yet Russia has been partly a supporter of Iran and more importantly obstructed several tough sanction on Iran and it was responsible for the construction of Iranian light-water nuclear plant. Russia has equally been supportive to its Slav brother Serbia over the secession of Kosovo. While supporting Serbia against Kosovo independence, Russia has been helpful to South and North Ossetia against Georgia. In the recent times, the tension between Russia and its neighbours, European Community and the United States was over the incursion of Russian troops into Georgia under the premise of protecting Russian in two sides of Ossetia situated in Georgia. The issue of inducting Russia neighbours into NATO has equally been troublesome as Russia sees such move as trap against its security. One other contentious issue was the Poland-Czech Republic military co-operation with the United States, with which Russia is much angered and ready to response harshly.

West/North Europe

Economic reassertion, fight against terrorism, international role play and more economic relations among European community characterizes the region in the recent times.

Economic Front

Globalization is of course no concern of one region and a dominance of one region rather it is the interdependence among the constituting regions. The EU has been furthering economic relations among its members and even outside the continent. This economic reassertion is believed to be an effort towards regaining the lost glory of the continent and to challenge the economic influence of the US on one hand and Russia on the other. However this does not insinuate that economic relations between the EU and United States or Russia are severed. In view of energy demand across the globe particularly among the industrialist nations, Europe is also looking for alternative against the Russia energy monopoly. In this vein, EU has been trying its best creating an economic

understanding with the Central Asia countries as the new energy hubs, perhaps many would want to be free from the energy dependency of the Middle East. Hence EU is making serious effort to ensure energy transfer from Central Asia to Europe, and thus the importance of Turkey has been very much underscored even though that country still battles over its membership of the EU.

Political Front

The European Community is yet to solve its nagging problem of European constitution as certain countries hold reservation against it. In the same vein, the EU is at moment closing its door for further enlargement which of course affects the likes of Turkey and Croatia and many Southeast European countries in the waiting list of EU membership.

Strategic Front

Strategically the European Community under the banner of NATO is bogged down in Afghanistan and still searching for an easy passage from this protracted conflict. It is however noted that many of the European countries are disturbed by the war and due to the death roll of their troops, publics in Europe want the return of their troops as was the case in Iraq. The demoralization in Afghanistan was recently boosted by the demand of the United States and the threat of Canada that the latter having the highest troops in Afghanistan would retreat if NATO members refuse to show support. Such threat was understood and France pledged more troops. Similarly with the trend of war on terror, Europe has been engaged on how to monitor, manage and keep inventory of travelers' data so as to abate the tendency of terrorism. Although many Europeans feel it is against their privacy right and that would make them more prone to US interference into their private life. The EU under the leadership of France has shown a great stamina and ability to mediate conflict within Europe as in the recent Russia-Georgia conflict.

It was also hard for the European Community to give their consent to the US missile system projected for Poland and Czech Republic. The community would not like to anger Russia and at the same time play friendly with the United States, by and large it resolved to play the missile system under the watchful eyes of NATO.

Social Front

In view of war on terror and the issue of social integration across Europe, Muslim related issue remains in the headlines. The issue of having equity of opportunity in the public space continues across Europe and the whole mantra of marginalization and less recognition has not ceased to be the societal syndrome. The recent global economic problem was not solely a matter of concern for the developing countries, but its effect was also reflected in Europe as publics in Europe vent their anger over the problem.

South Europe

Countries in the part of Europe though claim being secular yet still being haunted by religious issue. As in the west, they are also faced with minority issue and economic problems.

Economic Front

Economic wise they share most in common with the European Community as they are an integral part of the community and that which affects the community obviously reflects in the South as well. While other Southern countries might be well off, Italy is accosted with economic crisis upon the new administration of PM Silvio Berlusconi.

Political Front

The governments in the South either employ religion as tool or are challenged by religion. Policies in these countries have been carefully tailored by the demand of religion. The fact is that this region is predominantly Catholic and the Church continues to play very important role in both politics and social life. Many of the governments have been so strict on the issue of war on terror though some have been co-operative with the US; others have maintained a slack relation. Unlike other Southern country that welcomed the independence of Kosovo, Spain was very much opposed to it because of its consequence on its own territory. Spain over decades has been struggling with the ETA secessionist hence to acknowledge Kosovo will have serious implication on Spain. In view of past colonial relations between Spain, Portugal and Latinos, the colonial, religious and cultural affinity continues to bridge an understanding between Spain and the Spanish speaking countries in South America.

Strategic Front

Strategic wise they share most in common with the European Community as they are an integral part of the community and that which affects the community obviously reflects in the South as well.

Social Front

The issue of war on terror, confronting the demand of ethnic minority like Muslims related issues, social issues like abortion, marriage and other traditional value related matters take serious concern in the region. Many a time the popularity of a government is measured by extent to which it can manage public discourse over such religious and traditional issues.

South America

Economic Front

Economic wise the region is progressing and it is becoming another area of interest where the EU, China and India are directing their focus. However this does not mean that the United States has forgotten its backyard. The US continues to maintain economic relations with countries that are prone towards market-oriented economy and are ready to accept US interest. Yet one the development of the likelihood of EU in the region, as under the auspices of Brazil, South American Union was established to foster healthy economic relations in the region. Because of it potential China has established economic relations with twenty-one countries in the region and continues to extend its economic tentacles. The EU has also not failed to do the same by way of fostering democratization of the region through economic relations and also bring South America onto the platform of global economy. The economy giants of the region such as Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Ecuador are flexing their muscle to establish their authority. Nevertheless the foreign economic relation is sometimes warily acknowledged as avenue employed by the foreign power to meddle in their domestic affairs. In order to tell the world the status of region's economies some of the economic giants have been prodding out their influence beyond the region and even opening up bilateral relations with country of their interest. The energy endowment in the region has been another plus mark which propels the region into global recognition. Oil and natural resources available in reflected as tool for playing global role. In fact the active role of Brazil in bio-fuel discussion brought to spotlight the necessity and importance of Brazil in this regard. No doubt the global economic crisis also had an impact on the region and that triggered lot of resentment among the publics resulting to several economic policies at bailing out the situation. Another aspect of economic that resonates in the region relates to migration and the remittance from this social movement. Immigrants from the region to the US are contributing the hugely to the economic turnover of their respective countries.

Political Front

It might of course remain the backyard of the United States with appreciable acceptance of democracy yet the fact that most of the rising governments in the region are of socialist leaning remains underscored. The region is categorized as the arising democracy though not in full flesh of democracy practiced in the west as it is been tagged as authoritarian or illiberal democracy. Political tension continues to haunt the region inspite the presence of competitive political system. The tussle between the populist governments, socialist oriented and leaders with much leaning towards the United States continues. Hence the battle remains unsolved between liberal and social democrats in the region. This divide obviously translates to public sentiment and has contributed to public debate upon which the acceptability of government is measured.

Strategic Front

There is country wise security consciousness in view of the tension emanating among the super powers of the region. Of recent there was deadlock between Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador governments, in which the Colombian government was accused of violating Ecuador territorial sovereignty, though Colombia claimed it was in its national interest. The security alertness among the countries has spurred military build-up in the region and more importantly between those countries in support of the US and those against the latter. Venezuela has been closely associated with military buildup as it accuses the US of intending to attack its territory. Furthermore the region is long known for guerilla militant in different shapes, though many of these militant groups have turned political but the remnants are still under pressure from the government such as the FARC in Colombia known to be one of the oldest guerilla militants of the region.

Social Front

Much of the issues affecting the Southern Europe are equally reflective in the Latinos region, though less noise on war on terror. The region is also confronted with the issue of ethnic minority, social issues like abortion, marriage and other traditional value related matters remains prevalent. Many a time the popularity of a government is measured by extent to which it can manage public discourse over such religious and traditional issues.

Oceania

Economic Front

Its economic evolves around the Asia Pacific region, although less is mentioned of its economic relations

Political Front

There is a change of government in Australia from the conservative to labour party. The change was effected in view of the in-conducive political climate in the country. The labour party has pledged before taking over power to make a shift from the foreign policy direction upheld by the previous government. In fact Iraq issue was a serious concern for the public that fanned resentment against the conservative party.

Strategic Front

The country although has been an ally of the United States particularly during the several years of the conservative party in power. But the situation in Iraq daunted the public and affected the popularity of the conservative party which ultimately resulted in the latter defeat by the Labour Party with the intention of pull troops out of Iraq. Since its inception Australian troops have started returning home from Iraq. Yet there are other engagements

of the Australian forces in domestic political crisis of neighbouring countries. Australia sits on 40% of world Uranium and a board member of the IAEA. It has reckoned with the nuclear deal with India and the United States and intending to sell its nuclear energy to China provided the latter will not injudiciously use it.

Social Front

More often than not its social matters relate to solving hooliganism and racial hatred crimes. Since taking over power by the Labour Party in Australia, there has been lesser noise of Muslim related issues, perhaps the government has been more open to its minorities as it apologized to the aborigines for the centuries old mistreatment against them perpetrated by the white settlers. The government is seen to be more accommodating than the previous conservative party.

Canada/United States

Economic Front

Canada like every other developed country cannot claim untouched by the recent global economic crisis, yet according to the country's finance ministry it did better off than the United States and was able to maintain fundamentals of the market system. There have been few talks on economic clash of interest between the US and Canada as in the proposed cancellation of NAFTA by the Senator Obama is elected president. Unlike Canada, US has heavily been hit by the global crisis and more recently a great financial institutional depression which made the Bush administration to violate the essence of capitalism. The US dollar is facing depreciation across the globe and the hike in price of oil is telling on US consumer making economic issues more disturbing and issue for the electioneering campaign. Democrats are much interested in taking advantage of the economic somersault to regain the White House and woo voters towards their party.

Political Front

Canadian ruling conservative minority party is finding it uneasy to government as the Liberal party and other opposition is obstructing easy governance. The ruling party is asking for another election though oppositions are not set. While in the United States, after tough primaries the republican and democrat nominees continue to woo voters with issue oriented campaign. The country is quite weighed down by the economic problem and democrats would like to capitalize on that as a vantage point, while republican wants to use winning war on terror as a banner that they are more security conscious than democrats. The fact of the matter is that Iraq war and war on terror slogan has plummeted to certain extent while economic issue is resonating and hitching Americans the most. The debate also continues upon who is more vast and capable enough to handle foreign affairs, the run-up for election come November has been tainted by several political

assassination and jingoism. Similarly polls continue to show head to head popularity of the two presidential candidates.

Strategic Front

The US and Canada have many strategic issues contending them in the recent times most important are the Afghanistan crisis, Iraq war and the Poland-Czech Republic missile system. To combating the insurgence in Iraq there was budgetary and troop surge which to certain extent is said to make positive influence on the war in Iraq as the casualty level has declined over the months. There is equally an understanding bridged between the US troops and the Sunni insurgency. Iraq might be witnessing some positive development, Afghanistan is turning out more dangerous than expected which of course tells on the morale of forces in Afghanistan. It remains a battle with no expected end result. Democrats have been so critical of the Bush foreign military policy and better believe that such budgetary surge should have been used for the economic development of Americans in the US. The US was able to get Poland acceptance for its missile system, though the Czech assembly is yet to have a final say on the project. It was hard for the US selling the idea not until an agreement was reached under the banner of NATO before the European Community consented to the whole idea. The United States is seriously concerned about the relationship between Russia and its Latino neighbours particularly the left leaning government such as Venezuela. And lastly is the contentious issue of Iranian nuclear programme

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: October 15, 2008

**North/West, South Europe, Russia and Its Neighbours, Oceania, South,
Caribbean, Central and North America plus Canada**

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 5th-11th October 2008

Making an attempt to identify the West would necessarily requires the identification of regions sharing similar cultural bond, colonial heritage and history, economic similarities, proximity, same political impulse and also a part of the Judeo-Christian civilization.

The classification of the region West indicates a far-flung areas cutting across the two sides of the Atlantic (West/North Europe and North America) into the south hemisphere of the United States. It also includes the Mediterranean countries of the South of Europe and spreads to the Black Sea region reaching the large area of Caucasus and Slavic spacious Russia.

Unveiling the west with all of its characteristics does not necessarily denotes a region exclusively Christian, cultural monolithic and having nothing doing with the rest of world. Instead the West as it stands today is a configuration of many variables. Its present representation is that of a multicultural society as a result of historical events over the ages and more recently the wave and influence of international migration.

Russia and its Neighbours

Upon the economic reassertion of Russia in the recently times its influence is becoming more felt around the neighbourhood. Russian leaders obviously want to re-project the country as a Super Power whose influence should not be downplayed particularly in its self proclaimed sphere. Although the Central Asia countries have attained their independence couple of decades back, yet Russian economic influence on these countries continues to be a prevailing issue. In fact Russia has often maintained an explicit policy of friendship with any nation in the region ready to go in the interest track of Russia. In this respect Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan competing for supremacy in the region are always caught in the Russian interest game. Although many of the countries want to maintain an independent status free from the grips of Russia, they have been trying to

open relations with other power brokers within and across the region. They believe doing that would balance Russia hegemony, in spite all of these alternative seeking policies the influence of Russia remains underscore.

Economic front

Russia influence in the region owes much on its economic and military reassertion. It has continue to maintain a close relations with the Central Asian Countries as the latter countries employ an open economic policy in order to counterbalance Russia economic hegemony in the region. Most of these countries have entered into bilateral agreements with western countries and other power brokers across the region. The most troubling economic deal worrisome for Russia is the oil and gas pipeline deal between the CARs and the European Community. The latter is in need of energy and like to challenge Russian gas monopoly through the energy reserve of the CARs. Moreover it is very much interested in maintaining its influence as such the Russian government is ready to aid country that will toe its interest track, though Russia has continuously opened agricultural and technical assistance to the region and writing off debt to those that would rather stay along with Russia than going with an outside power. Turkey is another economic and strategic player as Europe is making effort to transit CARs' energy through Turkey. This of course is another serious concern for Russia, already the United States and the European Community wants to use Georgia as alternative against Russia as energy source to Europe and that informs why both United States and EU were seriously concerned when Russia invaded Georgia.

Political Front

Russia under Putin is rated to have advanced, though Europeans and the Americans believe democracy is yet to have a fruitful stay in that country, as the country still experience political closeness. The meddling in Russia affairs by foreign powers has brought more confrontation with Russia. Prime Minister Putin in today's Russia is seen as a powerhouse of the country even before he left the office of the presidency. Many in Russia believe new President Medvedev is a stooge of Putin. Nevertheless one can still see the power being flexed by Putin within Russia and in foreign policy issues.

The protracted brawl between Russia and its Caucasus Muslim community remains an international issue although Russia has tried to nationalize the whole event. Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Tartar and other Caucasus Muslim principalities are yet to relent their struggle towards independence, a struggle that has claimed hundred of thousands of life and properties. One important aspect of Russia policy in the region is divide and rule, the Russian government was able to choose people of its likings for the administration of the region and those repulsive of Russia authority are labeled rebel with whom there has

been a continuous fight. Another aspect of political tension for Russia is the recent conflict with Georgia wherein South Ossetia and Abkhazia lies at the heart of the conflict. The Ossetian is predominantly Muslim by religion but ethnically Russian, the later prejudice was the premise with which Russia launched its latest attack on Georgia. The incursion of Russian troops was internationally condemned and became a source of threat for the sovereignty of other neighbouring states.

Strategic Front

Russia in the recent times wants to rebuild its alliance with those countries that still maintain friendship or sympathy for Russia, thus Russia is ready to spread its military assistance to these countries. The creation of the Shanghai Security Cooperation which includes Russia and China indicates a new military alliance in the making. Iran which is having trouble with the west over its nuclear programme is already pressing for a permanent membership. Some in the west felt it is an alliance build-up between China-Russia and the Muslim states within the neighbourhood. More importantly the strategic importance of the region was highlighted during the recent past Caspian Sea Summit where all five members agreed to protect the region from intruder and an attack on a member will be followed by a collective action against the intruder. An indication that any attack on Iran will be collectively responded in view of its nuclear programme. .

Iran is although in a nuclear impasse with the western countries yet Russia has been partly a supporter of Iran and more importantly obstructed several though sanction on Iran and it was responsible for the construction of Iranian light-water nuclear plant.

Russia has equally been supportive to its Slav brother Serbia over the secession of Kosovo. While supporting Serbia against Kosovo independence,

Russia has been helpful to South and North Ossetia against Georgia. In the recent times, the tension between Russia and its neighbours, European Community and the United States was over the incursion of Russian troops into Georgia under the premise of protecting Russians in two sides of Ossetia situated in Georgia. Russia has shown its willingness to the independence struggle of the Ossetian, although that will contravene the support Russia has thrown behind its Slav brother Serbia over the secession and independence of Kosovo.

Saudi Arabia is of course a traditional ally of the United States in all respect, but recent military deal between Saudi and US arch rival Russia became a stunning event. Russia welcomes the development and such kind of deal will remain issue to be watch out for in the recent times.

Social Front

Muslim community in Ukraine and Poland are developing Islamic enlightenment for themselves as well as the larger society with the hope of better Islamic understanding. The role of religion particularly Islam has been somewhat minimal in the public sphere but there is a wave for reawakening growing among the Muslim community in the recent times.

West/North Europe

Economic reassertion, fight against terrorism, international role play and more economic relations among European community characterizes the region in the recent times.

Economic Front

The recent global economic problem was not solely a matter of concern for the developing countries, but its effect was also reflected in Europe as publics in Europe vent their anger over the problem. This anger was exacerbated as the World Bank proved that the recent past food crisis cannot be dissociated from the diversification of food for biofuel. As the hike in food price hit Europe so was the oil price, which obviously had a telling effect on the industrial sector. It was in this direction that certain experts in Europe requested governments to rethink over biofuel as alternative for the energy coming from both Middle East and Russia. In fact the idea was part of the plan to get relieved from the dependence on these two regions. Europeans particularly Britons have started waking up the essence of Islamic financial system. It is believed that London might soon become the Capital for Islamic Finance in Europe.

Globalization is of course no concern of one region and a dominance of one region rather it is the interdependence among the constituting regions. The EU has been furthering economic relations among its members and even outside the continent. This economic reassertion is believed to be an effort towards regaining the lost glory of the continent and to challenge the economic influence of the US on one hand and Russia on the other. However this does not insinuate that economic relations between the EU and United States or Russia are severed. In view of energy demand across the globe particularly among the industrialist nations, Europe is also looking for alternative against the Russia energy monopoly. In this vein, EU has been trying its best creating an economic understanding with the Central Asia countries as the new energy hubs, perhaps many would want to be free from the energy dependency of the Middle East. Hence EU is making serious effort to ensure energy transfer from Central Asia to Europe, and thus the importance of Turkey has been very much underscored even though that country still battles over its membership of the EU.

Political Front

The European Community is yet to solve its nagging problem of European constitution as certain countries hold reservation against it. In the same vein, the EU is at moment closing its door for further enlargement which of course affects the likes of Turkey and Croatia and many Southeast European countries in the waiting list of EU membership. The EU remains unequivocal on the closure of Guantanamo Bay prison, as the EU wants fair justice to be applied on the inmates.

Strategic Front

Strategically the European Community under the banner of NATO is waylaid by the Afghanistan conflict and still searching for an easy passage from this protracted conflict. It is however noted that many of the European countries are disturbed by the war and due to the death roll of their troops; publics in Europe want the return of their troops as was the case in Iraq. The demoralization of troops in Afghanistan was recently boosted by the demand of the United States and the threat of Canada that the latter having the highest troops in Afghanistan would retreat if NATO members refuse to show support. Such threat was understood and France pledged more troops.

Similarly with the trend of war on terror, Europe has been engaged on how to monitor, manage and keep inventory of travelers' data so as to abate the tendency of terrorism. Although many Europeans feel it is against their privacy right and that would make them more prone to US interference into their private life. The EU under the leadership of France has shown a great stamina and ability to mediate conflict within Europe as in the recent Russia-Georgia conflict.

Moving on track of non-proliferation the EU have not rest its demand for a suspension and ultimately total abandonment of Iran nuclear programme. In the recent times, the European Community once again revisited and improved its incentive to Iran rather the latter remains on its position. Hence along with the US, certain EU members earnestly want tougher UNSC on Iran, though Russia along with China has watered down the memento for such tough position. The rendition practices of the US across Europe were condemned by the EU Human Rights Watch and several countries were found complicit. Although many of these countries rejected the report of the EU yet some countries like Britain consented to only two rendition flights on UK soil.

Social Front

In view of war on terror and the issue of social integration across Europe, Muslim related issue remains in the headlines. The issue of having equity of opportunity in the public space continues across Europe and the whole mantra of marginalization and less recognition has not ceased to be the societal syndrome. Muslims in Europe still hold the view the

certain element of the society is responsible for the gap of understanding between them and the larger society. For instance the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) recently slams Germany Anti-Islam meeting scheduled to congregate all anti-Muslim and anti-immigration politicians. However the active media coverage of Muslim related issue has subsided as compared to last year. Yet in the UK and other western European countries Muslim youth are still under watchful eye, some apprehended and some still battling with court cases over terror related charges against them. While the issue of having the minaret and mosque construction remains a tussling issue among Muslim community and their host society, although in some of these societies Muslims have won the debate of having their mosque erected. As the tune of Muslim terror related incident sloops down the British court and church threw support for Muslim law (Shari`ah) as something practicable in the multicultural society of Britain. Muslim think tanks along with Muslim associations have tried developed a new marriage contract for UK Muslims in a bid to meet the demand of modern Muslims in their new homes. The new law is hoped to spell out the compatibility of Islamic law side by side British law system.

Similarly EU Human Rights Watch condemned the terror laws enforced in both Britain and France as these laws violate basis human rights even though they are directed at Muslims as immediate law to cub the imminent acts of terror. In the Scandinavian countries Muslims are still struggling with the prevailing freedom of speech and print upon which Islam has continuously been attacked while no blame shouldered on the culprit.

South Europe

Countries in the part of Europe though claim being secular yet still being haunted by religious issue. As in the west, they are also faced with minority issue and economic problems.

Economic Front

Economic wise they share most in common with the European Community as they are an integral part of the community and that which affects the community obviously reflects in the South as well. While other Southern countries might be well off, Italy is accosted with economic crisis upon the new administration of PM Silvio Berlusconi.

Political Front

The governments in the South either employ religion as tool or are challenged by religion. Policies in these countries have been carefully tailored by the demand of religion. The fact is that this region is predominantly Catholic and the Church continues to play very important role in both politics and social life. Many of the governments have been so strict on the issue of war on terror though some have been co-operative with the

US; others have maintained a slack relation. Unlike other Southern country that welcomed the independence of Kosovo, Spain was very much opposed to it because of its consequence on its own territory. Spain over decades has been struggling with the ETA secessionist hence to acknowledge Kosovo will have serious implication on Spain. In view of past colonial relations between Spain, Portugal and Latinos, the colonial, religious and cultural affinity continues to bridge an understanding between Spain and the Spanish speaking countries in South America.

Strategic Front

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Social Front

The image of Madrid train blast reminisce horror in the minds of many in Madrid and Spain at large. Hence terror cases related to Muslims are still in court awaiting justice.

The issue of war on terror, confronting the demand of ethnic minority like Muslims related issues, social issues like abortion, marriage and other traditional value related matters take serious concern in the region. Many a time the popularity of a government is measured by extent to which it can manage public discourse over such religious and traditional issues. Muslims Italy, Spain face the dearth of mosques as in many European society, the distinction for these countries lies in their Catholicism which of course has an active role play in the public space.

South America

Economic Front

Economic wise the region is progressing and it is becoming another area of interest where the EU, China and India are directing their focus. However this does not mean that the United States has forgotten its backyard. The US continues to maintain economic relations with countries that are prone towards market-oriented economy and are ready to accept US interest. Yet one the development of the likelihood of EU in the region, as under the auspices of Brazil, South American Union was established to foster healthy economic relations in the region. Because of it potential China has established economic relations with twenty-one countries in the region and continues to extend its economic tentacles. The EU has also not failed to do the same by way of fostering democratization of the region through economic relations and also bring South America onto the platform of global economy. The economy giants of the region such as Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Ecuador are flexing their muscle to establish their authority.

Nevertheless the foreign economic relation is sometimes warily acknowledged as avenue employed by the foreign power to meddle in their domestic affairs. In order to tell the world the status of region's economies some of the economic giants have been prodding out their influence beyond the region and even opening up bilateral relations with country of their interest. The energy endowment in the region has been another plus mark which propels the region into global recognition. Oil and natural resources available in reflected as tool for playing global role. In fact the active role of Brazil in bio-fuel discussion brought to spotlight the necessity and importance of Brazil in this regard. No doubt the global economic crisis also had an impact on the region and that triggered lot of resentment among the publics resulting to several economic policies at bailing out the situation. Another aspect of economic that resonates in the region relates to migration and the remittance from this social movement. Immigrants from the region to the US are contributing the hugely to the economic turnover of their respective countries.

Political Front

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Strategic Front

There is country wise security consciousness in view of the tension emanating among the super powers of the region. Of recent there was deadlock between Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador governments, in which the Colombian government was accused of violating Ecuador territorial sovereignty, though Colombia claimed it was in its national interest. The security alertness among the countries has spurred military build-up in the region and more importantly between those countries in support of the US and those against the latter. Venezuela has been closely associated with military buildup as it accuses the US of intending to attack its territory. Furthermore the region is long known for guerilla militant in different shapes, though many of these militant groups have turned political but the remnants are still under pressure from the government such as the FARC in Colombia known to be one of the oldest guerilla militants of the region.

Social Front

Much of the issues affecting the Southern Europe are equally reflective in the Latinos region, though less noise on war on terror. The region is also confronted with the issue of ethnic minority, social issues like abortion, marriage and other traditional value related matters remains prevalent. Many a time the popularity of a government is measured by extent to which it can manage public discourse over such religious and traditional issues.

Oceania

Economic Front

Its economic evolves around the Asia Pacific region, although less is mentioned of its economic relations

Political Front

There is a change of government in Australia from the conservative to labour party. The change was effected in view of the in-conducive political climate in the country. The labour party has pledged before taking over power to make a shift from the foreign policy direction upheld by the previous government. In fact Iraq issue was a serious concern for the public that fanned resentment against the conservative party.

Strategic Front

The country although has been an ally of the United States particularly during the several years of the conservative party in power. But the situation in Iraq daunted the public and affected the popularity of the conservative party which ultimately resulted in the latter defeat by the Labour Party with the intention of pull troops out of Iraq. Since its inception Australian troops have started returning home from Iraq. Yet there are other engagements of the Australian forces in domestic political crisis of neighbouring countries. Australia sits on 40% of world Uranium and a board member of the IAEA. It has reckoned with the nuclear deal with India and the United States and intending to sell its nuclear energy to China provided the latter will not injudiciously use it.

Social Front

More often than not it social matters relate to solving hooliganism and racial hatred crimes. Since taking over power by the labour Party in Australia, there has been lesser noise of Muslim related issues, perhaps the government has been more open to its minorities as it apologized to the aborigines for the centuries old mistreatment against them perpetrated by the white settlers. The government is seen to be more accommodating than the previous conservative party. The Australian provincial government is allowing the erection of Mosque, though some Australians are resentful of

the development. The argument of the government is based on religious freedom and multicultural society that such Mosque will represent the whole of Australian culture not just for Muslim cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the debate over certain religio-cultural aspect of Muslim life is coming forth in the Australian society such as the debate over polygamy.

Canada/United States

Economic Front

Canada like every other developed country cannot claim untouched by the recent global economic crisis, yet according to the country's finance ministry it did better off than the United States and was able to maintain fundamentals of the market system. There have been few talks on economic clash of interest between the US and Canada as in the proposed cancellation of NAFTA by the Senator Obama is elected president. Unlike Canada, US has heavily been hit by the global crisis and more recently a great financial institutional depression which made the Bush administration to violate the essence of capitalism. The US dollar is facing depreciation across the globe and the hike in price of oil is telling on US consumer making economic issues more disturbing and issue for the electioneering campaign. Democrats are much interested in taking advantage of the economic somersault to regain the White House and woo voters towards their party.

Political Front

Canadian ruling conservative minority party is finding it uneasy to government as the Liberal party and other opposition is obstructing easy governance. The ruling party is asking for another election though oppositions are not set. While in the United States, after tough primaries the republican and democrat nominees continue to woo voters with issue oriented campaign. The country is quite weigh down by the economic problem and democrats would like to capitalize on that as vantage point, while republican wants to use winning war on terror as banner that they are more security conscious than democrats. The fact of the matter is that Iraq war and war on terror slogan has plummeted to certain extent while economic issue is resonating and hitching Americans the most. The debate also continues upon who is more vast and capable enough to handle foreign affairs, the run-up for election come November has been tainted by several political assassination and jingoism. Similarly polls continue to show head to head popularity of the two presidential candidates.

Strategic Front

The US and Canada have many strategic issues contending them in the recent times most important are the Afghanistan crisis, Iraq war and the Poland-Czech Republic missile system. To combating the insurgence in Iraq there was budgetary and troop surge which to certain extent is said to make positive influence on the war in Iraq as the casualty level has declined over the months. There is equally an understanding bridged between the US troops and the Sunni insurgency. Iraq might be witnessing some positive development, Afghanistan is turning out more dangerous than expected which of course tells on the morale of forces in Afghanistan. It remains a battle with no expected end result. Democrats have been so critical of the Bush foreign military policy and better believe that such budgetary surge should have been used for the economic development of Americans in the US. The US was able to get Poland acceptance for its missile system, though the Czech assembly is yet to have a final say on the project. It was hard for the US selling the idea not until an agreement was reached under the banner of NATO before the European Community consented to the whole idea. The United States is seriously concerned about the relationship between Russia and its Latino neighbours particularly the left leaning government such as Venezuela. And lastly is the contentious issue of Iranian nuclear programme

Democrat presidential candidate Obama have reiterated the position of top US military officers that going to war with Iran would be of no value rather disastrous for the region. Hence Obama is of the view of having talk with contentious countries, though such assertion is not of the liking of John McCain Republican presidential candidate.

Social Front

It has not been that easy for American Muslims after the dawn of 9/11 facing lot of public criticism but the tide is somewhat subsided. As it was the case in Europe, Muslims in the US also complain of ill-treatment and bias against them in view of their faith. Meanwhile Muslim associations have been greatly involve in societal oriented programmes that could bridge understanding between the Muslim community and host American society. Couple to that has been the close relation of American Muslims association with other religious grouping trying to foster an understanding with the aim of shielding Muslims from the label of terrorism. The fact of the matter is that the economic crisis facing the US is telling on the country and people appears to be economically conscious than listening to the old mantra of Muslim association with terror.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: October 22, 2008

**North/West, South Europe, Russia and Its Neighbours, Oceania, South,
Caribbean, Central and North America plus Canada**

By: Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 12th-18th October 2008

Introduction

The report takes into account three broad themes of Erosion of Sovereignty and Fragmentation of Power and integration. Power is obviously shifting away from the centre that is the state. State monopoly of power is being challenged by various domestic and international forces in the shape of Mega-state, Mega-corporate, civil society and national government. Events that occurred along the year would be used as template to juxtapose and ascertain the presence of these themes. Furthermore, the issue of integration of ethnic and religious minority remains a contentious issue across Europe by which such condition of integration needed to be understood by its characterization. It should be noted that integration of minority is singularly not a Muslim issue rather condition that resonate all across the continent in different form and shape.

Detail of the Report

Erosion of Sovereignty and Fragmentation of Power

The involvement of foreign powers in Georgia recently is an indication that this neighbourhood country of Russia is struggling to maintain its sovereignty. Georgia of course launched an attacked on the secessionist region of South Ossetia which lies in the territorial jurisdiction of Georgia but the fact that significant proportion of Ossetians are of Russian stock triggered Russia to respond disproportionately. The Russian attack was met with outcry by the international community particularly the European Community under the auspices of the European Union. The Georgia-Russia conflict spurred a security threat within the neighbourhood as many of the former Soviet countries now allying with western power believe the Georgian incursion is a wakeup call for and a threat on their territorial integrity. Hence Georgia though a sovereign country had to succumb to the mediating power of foreign power in the shape of EU, US and Russia. (Report 10-16, July 2008)

The protracted talks of having a missile system in Eastern and Central Europe remained contentious discussion all through the previous year till the quarter of this year (2008). Although appreciable number of publics in both Poland and Czech Republic were resentful of harbouring the US missile system, but the fact that it was in the interest of state the public resentments had to be do away with. The fear of the public that such military project will further make them vulnerable to attack, this really did not go down well with the governments with the supporting view that having US military project will place them under shield of a world military superpower. By and large it was not until the coalescing effort of EU and NATO before the military project was agreed upon.

Russia is of the view that such military project will interfere with its strategic position and will always remain wary, hence by welcoming US missile system, Russia sent strong signal to both countries (Poland and Czech Republic) that they are liable of being attacked by its weapon. (ibid)

Serbia might be worried of the International stance on the issue of Kosovo though the latter has always been willing to become independent either with or without international recognition. Serbia sovereignty as a state has come under question over the independence struggle of Kosovo by which international bodies were greatly involved in the whole issue. The UN representative sent to the country made remarkable roadmap plan that obviously paved way for Kosovo independence on one hand while EU also required of Serbia to accept the reality of Kosovo as an independent state as prerequisite of joining EU. On the issue of Kosovo, the final straw broke the camel's back when the UN Secretary General called on Serbia to accept Kosovo independence as reality, a position that was seriously condemned by Russia that has firmly rejected the unilateral independence of Kosovo.(22-28, July) Similarly the United States maintained an unequivocal position that relations with this former socialist-national will be straightened if Kosovo is let go. (Feb 17-23)

The extension of EU and the United States power is obviously not limited to their sphere rather their tentacles of influence is quite reflective in Afghanistan, where NATO forces along with UN contingent forces continue to influence the security of this country. (17-23 July)

European community under the auspices of the EU proposed having common immigration rules applicable for all member states. This obviously challenges individual immigration rules in each member state. It is in this direction that some European Union members have made the EU constitution unrealistic in view of their individual discontentment about the constitution's content.

Turkey is one of those countries in the pipeline struggling to join the EU but the fact remains that Turkey domestic, social, political and economic bearing has been considerably influenced. The EU has continuously demand of Turkey to reform its system if it must really join the European community. Turkey relatively has responded to this European demand and caution has always been taken in Turkey not to hurt its Europe ambition. In this respect EU was very much influential in the public and court debate over the ban of ruling AKP party over the allegation of being anti-secular.

Turkey of course has not been alone nurturing the ambition of joining the EU; many of the Southeast European countries also longed same aspiration of the EU but their ambition is subject to concurring to the demand of the EU. The implication of this is that most of these countries ensuring that necessary reforms are effected in order to reach their target of joining the regional politico-economic power. Serbia being a part of this region has been struggling to maintain a political oneness between the Democrats and the conservative radical Serb parties with little or no leaning for the EU. In the same direction the Serb federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina has for many times taunted the Union over its overarching influence. (June 15-21, 2008 and 10-16 February)

International civil society like the Freedom House questions how Albanian politicians are interfering in independent institutions within the country. Many of the countries in the Balkan have in the recent times been alleged of serious political and economic ill-practices by these international civil societies like the Transparency International, Freedom House and host of others. (22-28, July)

The policy of a second country should be of no concern for any country or region as reaction will be tantamount to meddling in others sovereign right. On the premises of human right, the EU human right watch has remained staunch on the rendition policy of the United States. It is also in same fashion that the human right organ of the Union alleged and questioned the legality of eleven countries for their complicity in the rendition practices. Many among the EU members were found complicit, although many rejected the allegation yet Britain being among the countries alleged acknowledged that it allowed two United States flight on its territory though not for violation of human right but on logistic level. (June 15-21, 2008)

The violation of human right stands out as one of the premises with which the EU stands loggerhead with the United States. The treatment of many of the untried inmates at the Guantanamo prison posed a serious challenge for the United State foreign policy. It has been so hard for the US to sell its view to the world and particularly Europeans on the interrogation techniques and treatment of these inmates. Hence the EU has strongly

condemned the existence of the prison and has asked the United States government to close the unconstitutional prison. (Feb 3-9)

Consequently, the influence of the EU is quite visible in countries outside the Atlantic. Iran though on one hand struggles to settle its nuclear programme with the west and has also been asked to halt the execution of youth. Moving in same direction the EU wanted Turkey to change its human rights rules. (22-28, July)

Powerful countries within the European community have not only flexed their muscle within Europe but also extended their influence across the continent reaching the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Iranian nuclear programme remains one of the tussling issues for the community. Along with the United States, the community has facilitated sanctions through the United Nations against Iran. The latter remains obstinate on its nuclear programme and in spite of various forms of EU incentives, the view of Iran is that suspension or total abandonment of the nuclear programme will equate to losing its right as a sovereign state. Germany one of the powerful within the European community during its tenure of the EU presidency urged both Saudi Arabia and Syria to play a proactive role in the Middle East. (10-16 February)

Globalization has proved that countries and regions cannot in isolation exist instead will have to reckon with the interdependence of the world order. The EU might be economically viable yet it relies on Russia for energy supply. Hence Russia's strategic position as an energy centre for the EU has become a serious debatable issue, by which the EU always remains cautious in making stringent decisions or policies towards Russia. This brings forth the debate among the European community that Russia is having leeway due to its energy thus the community would have to seek alternatives to Russia's energy monopoly. In this background the EU has been closely involved in the energy business within Central Asia, even though certain human rights violations exist in that region, the EU is ready to condone such for its energy need. (10-16, February)

Integration

The issue of being a minority in Europe appears as a general syndrome across the continent. Virtually all of the countries suffer from this condition, however the nature and shape of the minority issue differs from country to country. Cultural, religious, ethnic, political and economic characterization will suit the minority issues within Europe. Although as a result of 9/11 and subsequent events in Europe the problem of Muslim minority has turned more prominent and gained much headline news.

Muslims in Europe continue to cry of marginalization as a problem confronting them in the continent though the mainstream society holds that it is a dearth of integration on the part

of the Muslim community. Whatever the argument may be, headlines have continued to show that certain corner of the society holds sentiment against the Muslim community. The recent anti-Islam and anti-immigration meeting scheduled for Germany was condemned by the Organization of Islamic Countries on the premise that such congregation of leading anti-Islam and anti-immigration politicians in Europe is doing no good to the larger society and more importantly hurting the propensity for integration. Consequently Muslim community across Europe and in the United States faces state's surveillance as measure of monitoring terrorists and a tool in the war on terror (July 10-16, 2008).

Such surveillance creates sense of insecurity and makes the Muslim community a black spot of the society. Hence Muslims youth across Europe remains suspect of terrorism and are randomly apprehended by the state security service. (Feb 17-23) After much ado on surveillance practices in Germany and investigation over the rendition policy of US supported by the Germany government, the government had to drop the case of the CIA kidnapping a German citizen, being Muslim by religion. (Feb 3-9)

It is in same vein that the functional terror laws in Britain and France has been outrightly condemned by the European Union Human Right organ. The laws are questioned for embedding contradiction of the European human right law. (15-21 June)

It is not as if all are against Muslims there remains room for understanding as many community leaders have tried to shield their Muslim community from the label of terrorism. In the United States, the aftermath of 9/11 was of course not welcoming to the Muslim community but as time passes by interfaith dialogues and faith outreach programmes gripped the American society in bid to effect changes. Thus, many of these programmes have spurred the view that there is no correlation between Islam and terrorism and thus anti-Muslim slogan should be dropped both by the media and politicians who take Muslim issues to gain status. (17-23, July)

The problem of integration and gap of understanding unveiling in Europe is singularly not limited to the Muslim community. Sikh religious group in Europe often expresses their ill-feeling against the public discrimination of their culture. (15-21 June)

Integration of ethnic minority is of course a long way process that would be determined by the accommodative propensity of both parties involved that is the mainstream and the minority group. In fact Muslim community across Europe has tried possible effort to vend off wrong image attached to their faith as the aftermath of 9/11, 7/7 and others. There has been serious integrative effort such as trying to bridge the communication and understanding gulf between them and the larger society. In this background, recently Muslim think-tanks and associations in Britain unveil new marriage contract hoped at alleviating the plight of Muslim couple in Britain. However the major aim of the new

contractual rule is to seek compatibility between the English and Islamic marriage laws. (3-9 August) Although not a Muslim issue, but yet an ethnic related issue, in Australia the aborigine group got a long awaited relief and satisfaction upon the new political dawn in the country. The aborigine ethnic group received the apology of the Kelvin Rudd government over the century old ill-treatment of this group by the white ruling group. (10-16 February)

Yet the issue of burqa remains in the headline in Spain, Holland and much other country trying to reduce the separationist tendency created in the public by wearing the burqa. Last year the former British foreign Secretary Jack Straw made a public drama in view of his position that the veil is separating Muslim women from the rest of the society, although during the same year Dutch politicians believes the veil create separation and also constitute insecurity. (3-9, February)

While in Australian though the Muslim community continue to strive for a better public space and conduct themselves as good citizens. The public resentment of Muslims has relatively subsided recently and that is further buttressed by the move of the government to grant the construction of mosque to the Muslim. The Australian government believes the presence of such mosque will further add to the cultural symbolism of Australian society not just of the Muslim. (22-28 July) Yet religious issue like polygamy did not escape public discussion. Australian court rejects such plural marriage as contravening the law of the land. (22-28 July) In a similar issue, a British MP objected to the family marriage practices among South Asian particularly Pakistan living in Britain. The call was raised on the medical implication of the practices although certain corner of the society rejected her call. (10-16 February) Muslims in Britain got irked by the knighthood honour accorded to Salman Rushdie.

Similarly in the United States, Muslim electorates are expressing their cornered and fencing politics played by the Obama campaign. The latter fears that making Muslim more prominent in the campaign will hurt Obama political train as many United States electorates appear not to be ready to vote for a Muslim president. Obama campaign group has tirelessly tried to clear the Muslim image linked with Obama. (22-28, July)

9/11 grievances obviously has subsided but its remnant remains haunting Muslim. Muslim community complained of being witch hunt and placed under surveillance and would have to face the music for saying things that if other says would amount to no punishment. (22-28, July) In a similar fashion second senior most London police Officer alleged that he has always been sidelined, however this is also true of other lesser officers laying the complain that their religion and ethnicity has been used against them either for promotion or important task.

It is of course noted that the trouble confronting Muslims in Europe is obviously related to the religio-cultural practices. The host society requires the Muslim community to amend and restructure some of these practices. Doing that will amount to provability of Muslim integrative tendency and the compatibility of Islam with the European societal value. In spite of these hurdles, the leader of Anglican Church of England and a superior court made a public groundbreaking comment that practicing Islamic Shari`ah in Britain is of no harm to the society. (29th June-5th July, 10-16 February) Although such public statement by highly reputable members of the society was received with mixed reaction, yet it was a further testimony that the possibility of integration is feasible if room for accommodation of others is entertained. London business community is waking up to the benefit of Islamic financial system and according to record London is hoped to be the financial capital of Islamic finance in Europe. (22-28, July)

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: November 5, 2008

**North/West, South Europe, Russia and Its Neighbours, Oceania, South,
Caribbean, Central and North America plus Canada**

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 26th October-1st November 2008

Introduction

The report takes into account the role of the civil society in all of the regions mentioned above. It of course recognized the impact of both domestic and foreign civil groupings across the region. Hence the impact of the civil group is reflected in all areas of the society such as politics, environment, geo-strategic, Social and human rights issue. Broadly speaking the report made use of previous data collection (news items) as premise for its position.

Politics

Richard Youngs is a Senior Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Democratization programme at FRIDE. He also lectures at the University of Warwick in the UK wrote an article entitled **The European Union and Democracy in Latin America** published in Jstor Journal Article.

Young's article was a comparison of the democratic venture of both the EU and US in Latin America. The article made a clear distinction between the democratic practices of both of these powers. According to him, the US approach has always been top-down, while the EU believes in bottom-up democratic reform in Latin America. Obviously both of these approaches have their weak and strong points. Yet the deducible fact is that the EU approach seems to be more tender and welcoming than the US confrontational approach. The former approach is often geared at impacting the civil society as avenue to effectively effect a change. Similarly the top-down design of the US is usually seen by many of the Latin American government as meddling in internal affairs. Yet that does not mean that the tender approach of the EU which believes in the bottom-up does not have its own limitation. The region sees the EU approach as foreign influence via westernized NGOs and local NGOs operating on EU fund and aids. This kind of situation hampers government readiness to accept reform, as in foreign funding of NGOs, usually democratic promotion can be seen as meddling in domestic politics. Hence Young argues that owing to the weak sides of the two approaches a balanced

democracy promotion policy in Latin America should combine bottom-up civil society and economic assistance with top-down political society work focused on political parties, local governments, the role of legislatures, and the accessibility of state institutions. Of course it would be hard to throw away the positive aspect of the EU democratic promotion that has been the broadest and densest frameworks of cooperation in Latin America, involving NGOs, parliamentarians, unions, business organizations, and cultural bodies. (31st August -6th September 2008)

The British Muslim community sought to become more involved in the political process in the wake of the July 2005 London bombings. After the attack British Muslims were faced with two options; either to maintain a low profile and hoped that tensions will recede over time, or become active participants in the political process. The UK Muslims took the second alternative wanting to dissipate that climate of fear and combat Islamophobia, Hence their involvement in societal issues, political process is of recent prominent.

There is no doubt that the London attacks created a climate of fear that led to the rise of Islamophobia. By reaching out across communities, a deeper understanding of, and respect for, other cultures develop. Issues such as social inclusion, housing, crime, education and immigration affect everybody, and British Muslims need to be involved in addressing these issues through active participation in the political process. The local polls taking place today across England represent an excellent opportunity for British Muslims to engage in the political process.

Moreover, the formation of the new Respect–Unity Coalition provides UK Muslims with an opportunity to shape the policies that affect them. The party was established in 2004 as a coalition of British Muslims, socialists, environmentalists and anti-war campaigners searching for common ground. It is fielding 165 candidates in constituencies across the country, although most of its efforts will be concentrated in the East London constituencies of Newham and Tower Hamlets, areas with a high concentration of Muslims. Over half of the candidates being fielded by Respect are UK Muslims, but as Newham candidate, Hanif Abdulmuhit, stresses: “Respect is proud to say we defend the rights of Muslims, but we are not a party of Muslims, rather a party for Muslims, as well as Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Christians, and all faiths and none.” The party is campaigning on a range of domestic and international issues. It urges an end to the occupation of Iraq and opposes any invasion of Iran. If Respect wins seats in Tower Hamlets and Newham, it will represent a significant vote of no-confidence in the Blair government’s policy on Iraq. The Muslim Council of Britain sent a letter to every mosque and Islamic centre across the country, urging Muslims to vote in order to highlight local concerns, participate in civic duties and make Britain a better place. **(May 4, 2006)**

Tony Blair ex-British PM tenure was punctuated by both success stories and otherwise, the latter was much profound and manifested itself in form of strong alliance between the US and British government. Blair sent troops to Iraq against stiff opposition in Paris and Berlin, rejected the Euro as fellow leaders embraced economic harmony and angered neighbors by playing hardball over the European Union budget.

Yet when the bid for EU president arises, Tony Blair emerged as a candidate to become Europe's first president? It is believed that Blair's dynamism would help push the continent's interests with the U.S. and emerging economies of China and India, others fear his appointment could trigger a new round of internal bickering after years of rancor over institutional changes.

However Blair does not really enjoys total support for the new EU highest ranking office. Elsewhere on the continent a campaign dedicated to halting Blair's bid before it officially starts gathered widespread support. A "Stop Blair" Internet petition launched by a group of European bloggers has attracted around 4,000 signatures since it was posted, while a statement opposing his candidacy has been translated into nine languages. "His role in the Iraq war would weigh heavily on the image of the (European) Union in the world," a statement by the European Tribune group said. "We declare our total opposition to this nomination." ut it's not just European citizens, or opponents of the Iraq war, who oppose Blair taking Europe's helm. Many of the European Union's 27 members also worry over a figure from Europe's big three, France, Germany and Britain taking on a role at the head of the EU, particularly a figure from the famously euroskeptic U.K. **(Feb 8, 2008)**

Economic

Argentina's President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was faced with trouble at home over her new campaign on farmers who blocked highways after heftier export taxes were announced recently, she made her position clear. "Picketers of abundance," The government has refused to yield to the call of the farmers even in the wake of the shortage of food products, thus she has earned lot of opposition. The latter sees her as not acting upon her promised before she was elected last fall. Many of her supporters although cheered the former senator against the agribusiness barons, dubbed as the Hillary Clinton of Latin America. According to Buenos Aires pollster Jorge Giacobbe, her rating approval has fallen from 42 percent upon taking office in December to 23 percent. Other polls show a similar decline, which her husband the former president Mr. Kirchner called "fake". Meanwhile many economist analysts have started showing concern about the economy that her obstinate policy might rendered the economy growth achieved during her husband tenure down. **(24th -30th May 2008) and (June 8-14, 2008)**

In Peru more than 5,000 indigenous and peasant communities in Peru launched a petition drive this week with the aim of getting President Alan García's decree promoting private investment in communally owned land declared unconstitutional. Legislative

decree 1,015, approved by García on May 20, makes it possible for indigenous communities in the country's highland and jungle regions to authorise the sale or lease of communal land to private investors with the votes of just 50 percent plus one of the members of the community assemblies. The new law modifies legislation on private investment that required the consent of two-thirds of the qualified members of the village assembly to sell or lease land. Now the votes of only a simple majority in village assemblies, who no longer must be duly qualified members, are needed. Five peasant and indigenous organisations have joined together to challenge the decree in the Constitutional Court and hold a series of protests and other activities. The demonstrations will begin Jun. 4 in Lima and will reach their peak Jun. 22-24 in the highland and Amazon jungle regions, and a national farmers' strike will be held Jul. 8-9, say the organisers. "We must not allow further abuses, and can't let them sell our land by imposing new laws that we were not consulted about," the president of the National Agrarian Confederation (CNA), Antolín Huáscar, told IPS. **(May 24-30, 2008)**

Environment

Still in Argentina, on the heels of a scathing government audit, and a globally unprecedented preventive closure of its refinery facilities in Buenos Aires Argentina, local groups have filed an international complaint against Shell calling for immediate action by the company to redress the social and environmental harms caused by the refinery to the community and to the local environment during decades of abuse and irresponsible corporate behavior. INPADE (a local NGO) and Friend of the Earth Argentina, representing the residents of Villa Inflamable, presented parallel complaints (called Specific Instances) to the Governments of Argentina and the Netherlands, today, against SHELL CAPSA (the Argentine affiliate of Royal Dutch Shell). The complaint denounces Shell for a long list of national, provincial, municipal and international law violations that are not only claimed by the community against the company, but that have been confirmed in a recent audit and preventive closure ordered by the National Environmental Authority of Argentina (the SAyDS). **(24th -30th May 2008)**

International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring the production and manipulation of nuclear technology under the auspices of the UNO has always been paraded by the United States with information in bid of nailing Iran for the alleged nuclear programme. The U.S. shared new intelligence with the International Atomic Energy Agency that it claimed was evidence Iran was trying to make a nuclear weapon. One of the diplomats of IAEA said Washington also gave the IAEA permission to confront Iran with at least some of the information in an attempt to pry details out of the Islamic republic as part of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's attempts to investigate Iran's suspicious nuclear past.

The U.S. is leading the push for a third set of U.N. sanctions against Iran. Tehran insists its program is intended only to produce energy and has refused U.N. demands that it suspend its uranium enrichment programme, technology that can produce both fuel for

nuclear reactors and the fissile material for a bomb. A recent U.S. intelligence assessment that Iran had a clandestine weapons programme but stopped working on it four years ago has hurt Washington's attempts to have the U.N. Security Council impose a third set of sanctions. **(Feb 14, 2008)**

In spite of Washington pressure on Iran, a Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) recently came up with the report warning against attack on Iran as counterproductive. According to the think tank, a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities 'is unlikely' to delay the country's programme. "Current knowledge of the (Iranian) complex is lacking," "Without that knowledge, an attack is unlikely to significantly delay Iran's mastery of enrichment with gas centrifuges." The principal author of the report, the ISIS president and a former UN weapons inspector, David Albright claimed that any damage to Iran's nuclear programme could be quickly repaired. Iran manufactures key components of its nuclear programme, making the country self-sufficient regarding the technology, Albright expounded.

Iran however has warned and threatened that any attack will be adequately responded as it is ready to inflict damage on US interest in the region and Israel which is a strong ally of US will not be exempted. The ISIS study also cautions that an attack against Iranian sites will backfire by compelling the country to acquire nuclear weaponry.

"An attack would likely leave Iran angry, more nationalistic, fed up with international inspectors and nonproliferation treaties," Albright said. "Iran would likely launch a 'crash' programme to quickly obtain nuclear weapons." Nevertheless Iran cites diplomacy as the only acceptable means for clarifying the nature of its nuclear programme and ending the nuclear standoff. **(3rd -9th August 2008)**

Geo-strategic

Publics in Poland and Czech Republic were not fully in agreement with the proposed US missile system argued to be shield for these countries against external threat. The system although was acknowledged by the governments of the two countries but there was great public resentments towards it from many stances. One was the environmental consequence and other was the insecurity it would further bring their country close to. In spite of the Greens and Communist leaning groups' action to make the system unrealistic, ruling governments of the two countries finally brokered accord with the USA on the system though with certain strings attached to the deal. **(17th -23rd July 2008)**

The role of the EU as a force influencing affairs within the Balkan states cannot be underestimated. EU was frank at making its straight to Serbia republic that its EU membership aspiration will remain hanging if the lack of political coherence between the pro-west and radical parties in the country persists. The EU enlargement commissioner said a political deal due to be signed with Serbia remains postponed because of a political dispute in Belgrade. Olli Rehn spoke of "the obstruction by certain politicians", in a clear reference to PM Vojislav Kostunica. The latter has always wanted Serbia to maintain its integrity and Serbia-ness while Serbian President Boris Tadic has been more or less western leaning. The EU had wanted to offer closer trade relations and relaxed visa requirements to Serbia which according to PM Vojislav Kostunica will 'undermine' Serbia's sovereignty and as a trick which will help pave the way for independence in Kosovo. Still Kosovo independence the civil society groupings in the newly self-declared country were very much active during the cause of independence struggle. **(Feb 6 and 7, 2008)**

The division of Kosovo from Serbia was not a rejection limited to the government arena, but was also rejected by many radical groupings in Serbia. Upon the declaration of Kosovo as independent state thousands of Serbs chanting "Kosovo is Serbia" marched to a bridge dividing them from ethnic Albanians while others torched U.N. border checkpoints and cars to protest Kosovo's declaration of independence.

NATO troops later closed down the roads leading to the checkpoints, cutting off the only link between northern Kosovo and Serbia, said Besim Hoti, a U.N. spokesman. The move appeared to be due to fears that the reduction of U.N. control of the border could allow Serbian militants to return to fight in Kosovo, a land Serb nationalists consider the cradle of their state and religion. Smoke billowed from two checkpoints separating Kosovo from Serbia and flames engulfed several U.N. vehicles set ablaze in protest against Kosovo's weekend proclamation of independence and anger over international recognition of the new nation. For two days, Kosovo's Serbs have shown their determination to shun the declaration by destroying U.N. and NATO property, setting off small bombs and staging noisy rallies through the Serb stronghold of Kosovska Mitrovica. The attacks on U.N. border crossings showed the protesters' willingness to use violence to hold onto Kosovo and could clear the way for Serbian militants to return to fight in Kosovo, a land Serb nationalists consider the cradle of their state and religion. **(Feb 19, 2008)**

What might appear as recognition of the self declared independent Kosovo was the acknowledgment of OSCE to support Kosovo in building a multiethnic and tolerant society. In an address to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Annual Session in Kazakhstan's capital, OSCE Secretary-General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut said the OSCE will support democratic processes in Kosovo and would aim to build strong local self-government structures to share OSCE values. **(29th June -5th July 2008)**

The long standing skirmishes between Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia turned a localized economic woe amid a border crisis. Between Venezuela and Colombia it all

started with accusation of meddling into internal politics and later turned into economic issue. Ecuador accused Colombia of raiding into its sphere in pursuit of guerrilla militias, an allegation supported by Venezuela, who believed that Colombia is flexing its muscle. The border crisis further metamorphosed into a serious food crisis within the neighbourhood. There was cut off of food supply from Colombia to Venezuela amid an international crisis over a Colombian raid on guerrillas in Ecuador that threatened the Colombian-Venezuelan trade relations. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was angry about the cross-border raid, said he will stop importing food from Colombia and his country will look for products elsewhere to replace the Colombian food products on which Venezuela depends. As for Colombia, he said, "we can't depend on them, not even for a grain of rice."

Venezuela is Colombia's second-largest trading partner after the U.S. Trade between the nations totaled \$5.7 billion from January through November 2007, according to Colombian government statistics. Venezuela imported \$4.4 billion in goods from its neighbor, nearly doubling from 2006 because of high demand for Colombian-made vehicles, car parts and clothing. Colombia, meanwhile, purchased only \$1.2 billion worth of Venezuelan goods, mostly petrochemical products and plastic goods. This economic standstill was quickly protested by workers whose livelihood depends heavily on the bilateral relations of the two countries. Hence owing to the protest and the involvement of a third part into the crisis, the trade relations was reopened in order to save Venezuela from further food crisis amid the international food problem that gripped the region during that period. **(March 7, 2008)**

Social and Human Right

The trial of the inmates in USA Cuba based prison has been troublesome on many grounds. The prison itself has been asked to be closed because many human rights and governmental groups feel it is unconstitutional. Similarly, in 2006 the US Supreme Court ruled the system unconstitutional. Months later, Congress and Bush resurrected the tribunals in an altered form under the Military Commissions Act.

But questions of due process could overshadow the trial proceedings, according to Jennifer Daskal, senior counterterrorism counsel for Human Rights Watch. "By trying these men before flawed military commissions in Guantanamo Bay, the United States makes the system the center of attention rather the defendants and their alleged crimes," Daskal told The Associated Press. Steven Shapiro, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a telephone interview that "the administration now has placed itself in terrible bind because it subjected at least some, if not all, the six men to harsh interrogation techniques that the world regards as torture." **(Feb 12, 2008)**

Under the Military Commissions Act, statements obtained through torture are not admissible. But some statements obtained through "coercion" may be admitted at the discretion of a military judge. A death sentence requires the concurrence of all members of the military panel that are present and the finding of a guilty verdict must have been unanimous. Sentences of 10 years to life in prison require concurrence of three-fourths of the panel members. Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Hartmann, the legal adviser to the military commissions, refused to discuss how and where any executions would take place. "When that time comes, if it should ever come at all, we will follow the law at that time and the procedures that are in place at that time," he said. A federal appeals court in Washington can hear appeals, but it can only assess compliance with the standards and procedures under the 2006 law. The Supreme Court may review that court's final judgment.

Any executions would probably add to international outrage over Guantanamo, since capital punishment is banned in 130 countries, including the 27-nation European Union. Yet it is not all civil groups that are against USA tough technique or capital punishment for the inmates. Many support the use of the death penalty for men blamed for the Sept. 11 attacks. "If these guys are found guilty, I can't think of any other case more appropriate for the death penalty," said Charles "Cully" Stimson, a senior legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. "An overwhelming majority of Americans support the death penalty." Michael Khambatta of the International Committee of the Red Cross said his organization would approve the death penalty only when there are "procedural and judicial guarantees that meet international standards." Khambatta, who is the deputy head of the ICRC's Washington delegation, declined to comment publicly on whether the ICRC considers the U.S. war-crimes trials fair. **(Feb 13, 2008)**

In the same vein, the New York-based Human Rights Watch group has further accused the United States of not mentally taking care of the inmates at the Guantanamo prison in Southern Cuba. According to the group most of the men held at the base in southeast Cuba - none of whom has been convicted - are worse off than convicts at the highest security "supermax" prisons in the U.S. because they are denied family visits and not permitted to have radios or televisions in their cells, the human rights group said. "Guantanamo detainees who have not even been charged with a crime are being warehoused in conditions that are in many ways harsher than those reserved for the most dangerous, convicted criminals in the United States," said Jennifer Daskal, a senior counterterrorism counsel at the New York-based group. A spokeswoman for the detention centre, Navy Cmdr. Pauline Storum, said about 15 per cent of the Guantanamo detainees are "followed for mental health issues on a regular basis" - a rate suggesting that prisoners there are healthier than at an average U.S. prison. "Detainees receive virtually no educational or rehabilitative programming to help them pass the time," it said. **(June 8-14, 2008)**

Opponents of President Hugo Chavez are marching to demand the return of an opposition-sided television station that was booted off public airwaves this week last year. Many are still upset by Chavez's decision not to renew the broadcast license of Radio Caracas Television, or RCTV, which had been critical of his government. Chavez replaced the network with a state-run channel that regularly transmits pro-government propaganda. RCTV now only airs on cable. Several thousand people marched through Venezuela's capital Sunday, shouting anti-Chavez slogans and demanding that RCTV's broadcast license be returned. Chavez had repeatedly accused RCTV of violating broadcasting laws and inciting a failed coup in 2002. RCTV executives have denied any wrongdoing. **(May 24-30, 2008)**

In El-Salvador there was a street march by at least 5,000 people towards the state capital San Salvador, to join in a hunger march. The march, convoked by the World Food Program (WFP), was aimed at calling attention of all social sectors to the problem of malnutrition in the country. Participants of the march included leaders of social organizations, diplomats, professors, students and workers, said the reports. Carlos Scaramella, a WFP representative in El Salvador, said the march was designed "to create a movement of global solidarity for the fight against hunger and malnutrition." "It's very important to join this movement due to the threat ... of rising food prices in the world," he said. **(May 24-30, 2008)**

In Turkey, the policy of the ruling AKP party allowing Turkish women with headscarf in public institution spawned public debate. The CHP opposition party accused AKP of violating the secular structure of the state and as such filed a court petition against AKP. The petition sponsored by the secular opposition party alongside other interest groups demanded the dissolution of AKP, banning of AKP politicians for five years and expulsion on the headscarf from the public institution by the court. The case however received both domestic and external response as majority of public in Turkey asserted that the headscarf signifies freedom for women.

The issue is deeply divisive in Turkey, where the state is strictly secular, and protests are expected. The government said the ban meant many girls were being denied an education. But the secular establishment, including generals and academics, see this as a first step to allowing Islam to figure more largely in public life. Parliament voted 403-107 in favour of a first amendment, which will insert a paragraph into the constitution stating that everyone has the right to equal treatment from state institutions; Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan was quoted by AP as saying. MPs then backed by 403-108 votes a second amendment stating "no-one can be deprived of [his or her] right to higher education", AP said. However, Ural Akbulut Rector of Middle East Technical University, We say it will damage secularity... Once you do that - we believe you damage democracy. **(9 February 2008)**

Equally EU human right watch also played significant role in diffusing the pressure on AKP as EU somewhat influenced the decision of the Turkish court against banning AKP for its headscarf policy. **(24th Feb. to 1st March 2008)**

Nicolas Birch specializes in Turkey, Iran and the Middle East analyses the freedom of speech in Turkey seen as the model of democracy for Muslim states. The core argument in the article is that in spite the level of democracy in the country citizens still do not have right to express themselves and are more likely to face court charges and ultimately sent to jail if they abuse Turkishness. Article 301 of the Criminal Code is the centre of the argument which many see as creating the problem, however after years of pressure from the European Union, which Turkey is trying to join; officials in Ankara finally revised Article 301 of the Criminal Code this April. Judges now need permission from the Justice Ministry to continue with prosecutions. The code however still remain confusing as prominent Turks are still threatened by the code otherwise left unchanged, barring the replacement of a phrase about "insulting Turkishness" with the equally vague "insulting the Turkish nation." The article further argues that "In Turkey, the judiciary, police and the armed forces see themselves as the three legs of a body whose role is to defend the state," and thus laws like 301 only strengthen that mentality. Perhaps police have continuously raided, arrested and killed people for trying to express themselves. **(13th -19th July 2008)**

Yet a recent public opinion poll has revealed that among Muslim populations, Turks are the largest number saying the media already has a great deal of freedom. A total of 74 percent say that people in Turkey should be able to read publications from other countries, even those considered enemies. Many Turks believe the media has "a lot" (41 percent) of freedom, the largest number among the Muslim publics asked, while an additional 31 percent say it has "some" freedom. 38 percent say it should have more freedom than it has now, while 30 percent feel it should have less and 25 percent feel it should have about the same amount.

Contrary to experts' reports, 72 percent of the Turkish population is pleased by the current state of press freedom, according to the "World Public Opinion on Freedom of Media" report issued jointly by World Public Opinion and the RI Foundation, international collaborative projects whose aim is to give voice to public opinion around the world on international issues. Though supporting freedom of the media in principle, Turks are one of the few publics divided on whether the government should have the right to restrict media freedom in order to maintain political stability. **(18th -24th May 2008)**

In the UK, Dr Rowan Williams the archbishop of Canterbury opened the debate about Sharia law in Britain. The Archbishop of Canterbury's desire to bring some aspects of Sharia law into the mainstream legal system is bound to prove controversial but his view is that if Britain is to develop cohesive communities, the role that religion plays in the lives of some citizens must be taken seriously. He argued that Muslims find themselves "faced with the stark alternatives of cultural loyalty or state loyalty" and that Britain will only be able to come to terms with its multi-faith society if its legal system learns to adapt. The archbishop said that anxieties "haunt the discussion of the place of Muslims in British society", and that sensational reporting of opinion polls means that any debate around Sharia has become distorted. Nobody in their right mind would want

to see in this country the kind of inhumanity that's sometimes been associated with the practice of the law in some Islamic states. He referred to the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, who has written that "many Muslim intellectuals do not even dare to refer to the concept for fear of frightening people or arousing suspicion of all their work". The archbishop accepted that Sharia is often the justification for appalling legal practices and punishments - but that is not what he is calling for.

The archbishop's comment was obviously scorned by members of the Christian society as Alison Ruoff, a Synod member from London, said: "Many people, huge numbers of people, would be greatly relieved [if he resigned] because he sits on the fence over all sorts of things and we need strong, Christian, biblical leadership right now, as opposed to somebody who huffs and puffs around and vacillates from one thing to another." "He's a very able, a brilliant scholar as a man but in terms of being a leader of the Christian community I think he's actually at the moment a disaster." 'Quite disgraceful' Brigadier William Dobbie, a former Synod member, described the Archbishop as "a disaster, a tragic mistake". In spite all of these Dr Rowan Williams defended himself "certainly did not call for its introduction as some kind of parallel jurisdiction to the civil law".

He was subsequently given support by other members of the British society. The most senior woman priest in the Church of England, the Dean of Salisbury the Very Reverend June Osborne, said Dr Williams was right to discuss Sharia law - despite it provoking controversy. "We can say he may have been politically naïve [but] I don't think he was." "Our society needs to be provoked into talking about these things. I would say that all of the law of Britain has got to work within the very high standards of human rights and Christian principles." The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) said it was grateful for the Archbishop's "thoughtful intervention" on the discussion of the place of Islam and Muslims in modern Britain. A spokesman said: "The MCB observes, with some sadness, the hysterical misrepresentations of his speech which serves only to drive a wedge between British people." The Bishop of Hulme, the Rt Rev Stephen Lowe, said he was dismayed at the "knee-jerk" reaction to Dr Williams' comments. "We have probably one of the greatest and the brightest Archbishops of Canterbury we have had for many a long day," he told BBC Radio 4. "He is undoubtedly one of the finest minds of this nation. "The way he has been ridiculed, lampooned and treated by some people and indeed some of the media within this process, is quite disgraceful." **(9 February 2008)**

Amid the discussion over legality of the Sharia in the UK came around the view of two governing Labour Party lawmakers called for a rank discussion of the health risk posed by Pakistanis who marry their cousins. Lawmakers Phil Woolas and Ann Cryer, citing high rates of birth defects, said Britons must question the practice of arranging marriages between first cousins. Both warned of grave public health consequences if the custom continues. Woolas, a junior environment minister, drew the most attention because of his Cabinet-level status.

Responding to the minister's stance Catherine Heseltine of the Muslim Public Affair Committee UK said "We feel strongly that the minister was irresponsible in his choice of wording,"....."When you have headlines about 'Inbred Muslims,' that takes things off track. We're not saying health concerns should not be addressed, we're saying it should be done sensitively during this climate of Islamophobia." Heseltine said the practice of marrying cousins is legal under British law and was practiced by Britain's royal family during Queen Victoria's reign. It is legal and common in many parts of the world. "This is a cultural phenomenon among people from particular regions within Pakistan," she said. "It's a tradition that has nothing to do with religion. We have to separate it from Islam."

In support of Heseltine's position, certain angles of the society questioned the authenticity of politician's claim. Medically, Steve Jones, a professor of genetics at University College London, said the increased risk of genetic disorders can be managed by prenatal screening. He said the politicians addressing the issue were spreading misinformation and unfairly targeting Muslims. "I would advise that government ministers make sure their brains are engaged before opening their mouths," he said, adding that smoking or drinking alcohol during pregnancy is far more risky for offspring than the marriage of cousins.

Yet other medical findings like the 2002 study by the U.S. National Society of Genetic Counselors found that most parents face a 3 to 4 percent risk of producing a child with a serious birth defect or genetic problem while closely related cousins who have children face a risk increased by approximately 2 percent. But the experience of researchers at Bradford Teaching Hospital suggests a more serious situation. The hospital, which serves a community with a large Pakistani population, reports an unusually high rate of inherited gene disorders. Researchers estimate the rate of birth defects is 10 times higher than in the general population, spokeswoman Leanne Wilson said in a statement. High rates of deafness, degenerative nerve disorders and children born with small heads and learning disabilities have been found, she said. The statement said marriage patterns among Pakistanis are "likely to be a major factor" in the rate. **(Feb 14, 2008)**

While in the Netherlands, the newly formed government began a process geared at banning the burqa from school and possibly from the public sphere. The move was largely symbolic as only around 150 women are believed to wear burqas in this country of 16 million. But it was another sign of the turning tide of Dutch tolerance as the nation seeks to assimilate its Muslim population of about 840,000. Conservative Dutch politicians were very much in support of the move as they see the burqa constituting threat to the security of the society. Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said "I value being able to look somebody in the eye,"...."I find it unpleasant.", referring to the fact that the robes cover a woman's face. Interior Minister Guusje ter Horst said the Cabinet

concluded there was no need to legislate a total burqa ban. "Many organizations already have tools with which they can prohibit the wearing of a burqa," she said. The government has been under pressure from conservative parties to ban burqas outright hence the announcement appeared unlikely to satisfy those calls. But legal experts have said that a total ban would be unconstitutional and breach international agreements. However Mobis, an umbrella organization for public transport companies, said in a letter to ministers that a burqa ban on buses, trains and trams is unnecessary and unenforceable. "Face-covering clothing forms neither a threat to public order nor does it increase the risk of people traveling without a ticket," the group's chairman Maarten van Eeghen wrote in a letter to the interior and justice ministers. Similarly, Famile Fatma Arslan, a Muslim lawyer who wears a head scarf in court, said she didn't see the need for the moves given the small number of women who wear a burqa. "I understand that it is a signal from the Dutch government to the Muslim community that that is the limit ... that the burqa is not accepted here in the Netherlands," she said. **(Feb 8, 2008)**

A couple of years back the Danes witnessed the intensity of Muslims' ire on the caricature of the prophet Muhammad published by Jyllands-Posten newspaper. The tension receded after series of talk and compromise and rejection of such publication.

However Denmark's leading newspapers reprinted a drawing of the Prophet Muhammad, a day after three men were arrested on suspicion of plotting to kill the cartoonist whose work had spurred deadly protests in the Muslim world. The papers said they wanted to show their firm commitment to freedom of speech after Tuesday's arrests in western Denmark. The Jyllands-Posten newspaper, which first published 12 depictions of Muhammad on Sept. 30, 2005, reprinted Kurt Westergaard's cartoon in its Wednesday edition. Several other major dailies also reprinted the drawing, which shows Muhammad wearing a turban shaped like a bomb with a lit fuse. "We are doing this to document what is at stake in this case, and to unambiguously back and support the freedom of speech that we as a newspaper will always defend," said the Copenhagen-based Berlingske Tidende. The cartoon by Westergaard and 11 others sparked deadly protests across the Muslim world when they were published two years ago in a range of Western newspapers. **(Feb 13 and 14, 2008)**

Muslims in Denmark filed petition against the newspaper in expectation that the court will be in their favour. Surprisingly, Danish Western High Court said it was not proven that Jyllands-Posten's purpose in printing the cartoons was to depict Muslims as criminals or terrorists. The court in Aarhus, 125 miles northwest of Copenhagen, upheld last year's lower court ruling, which rejected claims by Danish Muslims that the 12 drawings were meant to insult the prophet and make a mockery of Islam. The Jyllands-Posten daily has apologized and said it had not intended to offend Muslims. But it stands by its decision to print the drawings to challenge a perceived self-censorship. Meanwhile

Muslim organization spokesman said "We are very disappointed and sad about the outcome," said Mohammed Nehme, a spokesman for Islamic Faith Community, one of seven groups that appealed the lower court ruling. "We had hoped it would be in our favor but now we have the court's word that what they did was in order." Nehme said the group had not yet decided whether to appeal to the Supreme Court.

The court ruled that terror acts have been carried out in the name of Islam, and that it was not illegal under Danish law to make satirical drawings to illustrate that. The Muslim groups filed the defamation suit in March 2007 after Denmark's top prosecutor declined to press criminal charges, saying the drawings did not violate laws against racism or blasphemy. **(15^h -21st June 2008)**

In France, the print media which represents an aspect of the civil society was found complicit in crime against humanity alongside far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen by a Paris court. A Paris court gave French far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen a three-month suspended prison sentence and a \$14,500 fine for denying the brutality of the Nazis' World War II occupation of France. Le Pen was convicted of complicity in justifying war crimes and complicity in contesting a crime against humanity for comments he made during a 2005 interview with the far-right weekly Rivarol. The magazine quoted Le Pen as saying: "In France at least, the German occupation was not particularly inhumane, even if there were a few blunders, which is inevitable in a country of 550,000 square kilometers (220,000 square miles)." The court also fined the director of Rivarol magazine \$7,250, while a journalist for the publication was fined \$2,900. They were convicted of similar offenses for having published Le Pen's remarks. Le Pen has been convicted of racism or anti-Semitism at least six times, in one case calling the Nazi gas chambers "a detail of the history of the Second World War." **(Feb 8, 2008)**

In Albania businesses have little or no sense of social responsibility, according to a UNDP-sponsored survey published June 23rd. The report points to the low level of involvement by businesses in terms of donations, social assistance or financial support. "It is important to underline that Albanian companies don't donate money to charity," UNDP representative Marina Kaneti said, adding that state structures must do more.

Similarly the Freedom House reported that Albanian government and political elite tended to control independent state institutions last year. In the report of the Freedom House published on Tuesday (June 24th). The document, called "Nations in Transit", says parties in power control the appointment of officials in these key institutions. The report by the non-profit organisation added that while Albania has a long way to go towards democracy and a market economy, the most serious challenges stem from efforts to reform the justice system and curb corruption. **(22nd -28th July 2008)**

Muslims in Catholic overwhelming country like **Spain** cry for place of worship. The mosque shortage stems partly from the lack of resources common to any relatively poor, rapidly growing immigrant group. But in several places, Muslims trying to build mosques have also met resistance from communities wary of an alien culture or fearful they will foster violent radicals. Although Spain is peppered with the remnants of ancient mosques, most Muslims gather in dingy apartments, warehouses and garages like the one on North Street, pressed into service as prayer halls to accommodate a ballooning population.

Distrust sharpened after a group of Islamists bombed commuter trains in Madrid in March 2004, killing 191 people, and in several cities, local governments, cowed by angry opposition from non-Muslims, have blocked Muslim groups from acquiring land for mosques. The result, Muslim leaders say, is that some Muslims feel anchorless and marginalized. On this backdrop Mr. Kouitene, vice president of the Islamic Association for Union and Cooperation in Lleida, a prosperous medieval town in northeastern Spain surrounded by fruit farms that are a magnet for immigrant workers. Freezing in winter and stifling in summer, observed the necessity for a better comfortable place of worship for Muslim in the neighbourhood. "It's just not the same to pray in a garage as it is to pray in a proper mosque," the prayer hall is so cramped that the congregation, swollen to 1,000 from 50 over the past five years, sometimes spills onto the street. Hence "We want a place where we can pray comfortably, without bothering anybody." (**March 16, 2008**)

In Italy, the internet has become a medium where conventional information dissemination is either challenged or gets boosted. It has become the avenue with which information turns proliferated beyond the narrow corridor of men of letters. Political and community leaders in Italy have denounced an internet blog accusing 162 Jewish university professors of creating a Zionist lobby. Most of those named are from La Sapienza university, where several academics signed a petition objecting to a visit by Pope Benedict. The resulting backlash on the internet included diatribes against Jews and communists. The blog, which has now been taken down, carried anti-Semitic slogans. The Jewish community in the city called on the institutions to block what it called a "cancer" that could spread. Then Italian Interior Minister Giuliano Amato called for the blog's authors to be prosecuted. The BBC's Frances Kennedy in Rome says that for older Italians, this incident recalls the 1938 race laws passed by the dictator Benito Mussolini. Under those laws, Jewish students were expelled from schools, Jews were banned from state jobs and also forbidden to marry outside their race. The laws paved the way for the eventual deportation of some 8,000 Italian Jews, many of whom died in concentration camps. (**8 February 2008**)

Still in **Italy**, abortion, not usually a major election topic but played an important role in early campaigning for April's parliamentary elections. It was a come-back ploy by former PM Silvio Berlusconi, bided to retake the job. Berlusconi said he was in favour of a U.N. moratorium on abortion. But he also stressed that individuals and his political allies are free to make up their own minds. Berlusconi abortion campaign was made

popular and resonated by the weekly magazine *Tempi* that he believes the United Nations should recognize there is a human right to life from "conception until natural death" the same terminology the Vatican uses to express its opposition to abortion.

Prominent conservative journalist Giuliano Ferrara, who is close to Berlusconi and was a minister in his conservative government at one time, reopened the Italian debate on abortion in December by proposing a universal moratorium in his newspaper, *Il Foglio*, after the U.N. General Assembly called for a moratorium on the death penalty. His proposal was immediately backed by top Catholic Church officials, including Italian Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the pope's vicar for Rome. Ferrara reasoned that if the U.N. could approve a moratorium on executions, it should approve one on abortions, arguing that millions of "innocents" are killed each year in what he called the "supreme scandal of our time." Asked by *Tempi* if he supported Ferrara's proposal, Berlusconi replied, "I think that recognizing the right to life from conception to natural death is a principle that the U.N. could make its own, just as it did with the moratorium on the death penalty." Center-left leaders resoundingly oppose Ferrara's call and reject any change to Italy's existing law. (Feb 12, 2008)

However it would be misleading to assert that such conservative stance on abortion is the general view among Italians. Clamoring for the right on abortion, hundreds of women rallied in Rome and Naples to protest police interrogation of a woman after she underwent an abortion and to oppose a campaign push by some conservatives to change Italy's abortion law. State television said at least one woman was detained by police after protesters scuffled with officers when they tried to move the rally to a square in central Rome. Then Health Minister Livia Turco supported the women's view and showed her solidarity with demonstrators, who held placards proclaiming that "Women do the choosing" and other slogans. (Feb 14, 2008)

Russia political transition and democratic practices is often questioned as inappropriate by the west particularly the United States, an accusation often refuted by the Kremlin as baseless. However during the run-up of last election held in Russia, OSCE an international election monitoring organization said it will not observe Russia's presidential election because of the "severe restrictions" imposed by the Kremlin. The head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's election monitoring arm said in a statement that the timeframe set by Russian authorities had already prevented monitors from observing many important parts of the election process. "An election is more than what happens on Election Day," said Christian Strohal, director of OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. OSCE had accepted the Kremlin's limitations to the number of monitors it could use during the (March 2, 2008 election). Russia originally invited 70 OSCE monitors, then said Monday it would allow up to 75, said Curtis Budden, acting spokesman for the election monitoring organization. (Feb 7, 2008)

Still on Russia, the New York-based Human Rights Watch accuses Russian security forces of being responsible for widespread human rights abuses in the southern province of Ingushetia near Chechnya. In a recent report released, Human Rights Watch said it has documented dozens of summary and arbitrary detentions, acts of torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions committed by security forces combatting insurgents in Ingushetia. There was no immediate comment from Russian authorities, who rarely comment on such allegations. Human Rights Watch urged the Russian government to change what it called "brutal" counterinsurgency policies and punish those responsible for violations in Ingushetia, which the rights group compared to rampant rights abuses during the two wars in neighboring Chechnya. Human Rights Watch said in the report that "dirty war" tactics against insurgents would likely further destabilize the situation in Ingushetia and beyond in the North Caucasus. **(22nd -28th July 2008)**

In Belarus, journalists are availing the advantage of the internet as alternative media from the huge censorship in the print media. They have launched protest over government action to censor the internet news production. Belarusian journalists filled their pages with grim black banners to protest a new media law that will severely restrict the last source of independent information in the repressive ex-Soviet state. The legislation also forbids all Belarusian media outlets from accepting foreign funding, a restriction that will affect about 30 publications that now receive U.S. or EU money. The new measures require all Internet sites to be officially registered with the government; many independent newspapers that have been closed down by the authorities have taken refuge in cyberspace. The legislation also toughens controls on journalists, who can be imprisoned for two years for reproducing foreign media reports that "discredit Belarus." The bill, which won final approval in the lower house of parliament Tuesday, cracks down on news Web sites, the last remaining sources of uncensored information in this country of 10 million. Many newspapers that have been closed down have found refuge in cyberspace and become the only place for Belarusians to gain access to independent news and analysts. The bill was drafted by President Alexander Lukashenko, authoritarian ruler since 1994. The government argues the Internet must be brought to heel to protect Belarusians from foreign propaganda. "We have to protect society from the negative effects of the Internet," First Deputy Information Minister Liliya Ananich told parliament members Tuesday. **(22nd -28th July 2008)**

In the US, both layman and the highly skilled professional will agree to the view that the event of 9/11 had a remarkable effect on the Muslim community for years, though the tide is receding. The Muslim community has been engaged in different community programmes to diffuse the tension and bridge an understanding between them and the mainstream.

A group of Southern California interfaith leaders and community activists sent a joint letter to the office of Rep. Ed Royce (R-Fullerton) urging him to stop using language that links the faith of Islam to terrorism. In recent newsletters and speeches, Rep. Royce has repeatedly used phrases such as "Islamist terrorism" to refer to acts of violence and terror. In the letter, local interfaith and community leaders stated: "Congressman Royce, using this type of language may not only offend and alienate the overwhelming majority of Muslims, who abhor violence, but it may also unintentionally legitimize terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and other anti-American forces. ... "According to the Homeland Security recommendations, by using phrases like 'Islamic terrorism,' U.S. officials and representatives may be 'unintentionally portraying terrorists, who lack moral and religious legitimacy, as brave fighters, legitimate soldiers or spokesman for ordinary Muslims.' "The report also urges 'caution in using terms such as 'jihadist,' 'Islamist,' and 'holy warrior' as grandiose descriptions,' to avoid associating acts of violence or terrorism with religious concepts." "Stereotyping or profiling, though easily done, is destructive to human relations that are needed to bring about understanding, justice, and peace," said Dr. Ed Linberg, Associate Pastor of First Christian Church in Fullerton. Rabbi Steven Jacobs, founder of the Progressive Faith Foundation, added: "American Jews are all too familiar with institutional bigotry. It is alarming that an elected official uses Muslims as political scapegoats associated with global tragedies including terrorism and war to instill fear and hatred. We, in the Interfaith Community, condemn this policy of divide and conquer for political purposes. We welcome Congressman Royce to sit with us and learn the art of cooperation, not confrontation." "There is nothing 'Islamic' about terrorism," said Hussam Ayloush, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Greater Los Angeles Area. "It is offensive and wrong to make such an association, whether it is done by the terrorists themselves or our elected officials." (17th -23rd July 2008)

The idea of an annual Sunday get-together at a North Seattle mosque stemmed from an incident two days after the Sept. 11 attacks. A man splashed gasoline on cars in the Idriss Mosque parking lot and started to flee. When congregants followed him, he turned and fired shots into the ground. It was the first local hate crime after the attacks. Neighbors stood watch at the mosque 24 hours a day. Thousands of people came by, flooding the congregation with flowers and cards to show them not everyone was filled with hate. As part of an ongoing "thank you," mosque director Hisham Farajallah and others organized a neighborhood barbecue, inviting everyone with hopes they'd break down stereotypes. The first year, about 100 people showed. On Sunday, the Muslim community welcomed more than 800 throughout the afternoon, including hundreds from outside their congregation. "This is our goal," said Farajallah, a Boeing engineer by day. "To get people to know and understand each other." (17th -23rd July 2008)

According to the recent Pew survey it is becoming alarming that religion is greatly influencing politics than expected in the United States and voters particularly conservatives want religion out of social and political sphere. On this question, the gap between conservatives and liberals is narrowing: just four years ago, liberals were twice

as likely as conservatives to say churches should stay out of politics. Now, 50 percent of conservatives and 57 percent of liberals think that. Four years ago, 62 percent of liberals opposed church involvement in politics. Democrats and Republicans are about even on the question, as well. The survey also found largely unchanged attitudes along religious lines on the presidential choices compared with 2004, despite Democrat Barack Obama's strong play for religious voters and Republican John McCain's hesitancy to talk about his own faith and problems connecting with his party's evangelical base. McCain leads Obama 68 percent to 24 percent among white evangelical Protestants, comparable to what President Bush was polling four years ago. But the support is tepid: just 28 percent of white evangelicals call themselves "strong" supporters of McCain, well short of Bush's 57 percent in 2004. Changing attitudes about mixing church and politics could emerge as a factor in the fall campaign — particularly for McCain. Both campaigns are plotting get-out-the-vote efforts in faith communities, but past Republican successes came when attitudes were more welcoming.

The attitude shift cut across conservative constituencies: 46 percent of Republican Protestants want churches out of politics, up from 28 percent in 2004. Thirty-six percent of white evangelical Republicans hold that view, up from 20 percent four years ago. The question asked specifically about places of worship, which by law cannot take stands for or against candidates or political parties but may speak out on issues. So the public might hold different views about political stances taken by religious leaders speaking as individuals or religious advocacy groups. The findings come after midterm elections in 2006 that saw Democrats seize control of Congress, a landmark court ruling this year legalizing gay marriage in California, and also amid an identity crisis among conservative evangelicals about which issues should take priority and who speaks for the movement. **(17th -23rd July 2008)**

Australian new PM, Rudd Kevin made a remarkable step as his government apologized to the aborigine community of Australia over century old ill-treatment of most deprived and poor community in Australia. In a historic parliamentary vote that supporters said would open a new chapter in race relations, lawmakers unanimously adopted Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's motion on behalf of all Australians. "We apologize for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians," Rudd said in Parliament, reading from the motion. The apology is directed at tens of thousands of Aborigines who were forcibly taken from their families as children under now abandoned assimilation policies. "For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry," the motion said. "And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry."

Aboriginal leaders generally welcomed the apology, though some said it was empty rhetoric without addressing the issue of compensation. Noel Pearson, a respected Aborigine leader from Queensland state, wrote in The Australian newspaper on Tuesday that offering an apology without compensation meant: "Blackfellas will get the words,

the whitefellas keep the money." Marcia Langton, an Aborigine academic at the University of Melbourne, also said the question of compensation must be addressed, but celebrated the apology as a huge step forward. Michael Mansell, spokesman for the rights group the National Aboriginal Alliance, said the word "sorry" was one that "Stolen Generation members will be very relieved is finally being used." Mansell, who has urged the government to establish an \$880 million compensation fund, said he still hoped Rudd would be open to the idea. Tony Abbott, the indigenous affairs spokesman for the main opposition coalition, said his bloc had reversed its previous objection to the apology in part because Rudd promised there would be no compensation. But to some Aborigines, the apology was just one step. "Today will be closure for some people but it won't for others," respected leader Lowitja O'Donohue told ABC radio. "There will be wall to wall litigation if the government doesn't deal with the recommendations of the (government inquiry), and one of them is reparations." **(Feb 12, 2008)**

Many civil groups within the aborigine community planned to launch court action against the government refusal to pay compensation. Those planning to launch court action were victims of the so-called "Stolen Generations" policies under which Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families, Lyn Austin told ABC radio. "I do know that there are 30 or 40 that are going to be doing a civil action claim" in the southern state of Victoria, said Austin, head of "Stolen Generations Victoria"....."I believe there are others happening in other states," she said. "It should be left for the courts and people to have that choice and make a choice of whether they take a civil claim individually or (a) class action." Rudd singled out the "Stolen Generations" **(Feb 15, 2008)**

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: November 12, 2008

Europe, North America and Rest of the World

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 2nd -8th November 2008

Global Governance

Blog One: 51 Reasons To Say No To Global Governance

(<http://saynotoglobalgovernance.blogspot.com/2007/10/51-reasons-to-say-no-to-global.html>)

We know of many blogs championing the cause of global governance. However this blog objects to that project. The blog takes on issues related to Alliance of Civilizations, United Nations, European Neighborhood Policy, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/Barcelona Process, Herzliya Conference, Atlantic Forum of Israel, Israel, New Age Religion, NATO, NATO PA, 7 year Agreement ENPI, Bible Prophecy, The Europe-NATO-Israel Triangle, NATO's Transformation, the Mediterranean Dialogue and NATO-Israel Relations, Geopolitics, Russia)

The blog tries to spread the view that global governance in the shape of an international organization be its socio-political, economic, military or cultural will undermine the sovereignty of national and local government. Such project according to the blog will further make the regions across the globe susceptible to external influence. Sharing its view with other likeminded fellows, the blog says there are 51 reasons to say no to global governance

1. Global Central Bank corruption, fraud and abuse with no accountability
2. Global Government corruption, fraud and abuse with no accountability
3. Military Industrial Complex corruption, fraud and abuse with no accountability
4. Global Police State powers enacted
5. Secret policies and amendments without the public's consent
6. Transfer of wealth from the middle class to the Upper Class
7. No more local voice

8. No public accountability
9. Media control by corporations and banks
10. No freedom of speech
11. No Habeas Corpus no more innocent until proven guilty
12. No liberty to travel to and fro strict activity prohibitions applied
13. No liberty to believe in ones own belief as TRUTH
14. Extreme taxation
15. Military abuse
16. Corporate and Bank run governments and municipalities
17. Pharmaceutical fraud and abuse with no accountability
18. Medical fraud and abuse with no accountability
19. Secret tribunals in the public/private sector
20. National Sovereignty abolished

Although fifty-one reasons are posted all arguing towards to view that global governance challenges national and domestic sovereignty and displaces domestic accountability. The blog opined that allowing global governance will be tantamount to a shift of allegiance and loyalty from national and domestic bodies to international bodies and systems.

Blog two: Internet Governance Project (IGP)

(<http://internetgovernance.org/index.html>)

Internet Governance Project is a multi-lingua blog aimed at ensuring freedom of press and global governance via the internet.

The Internet Governance Project (IGP) is a consortium of academics with scholarly and practical expertise in international governance, Internet policy, and information and communication technology. The Project conducts research on and publishes analysis of global Internet governance. The work is intended to contribute to policy discussions in the Internet Governance Forum, ICANN, WIPO and related debates at the global, international, regional and national levels.

The goal of the Internet Governance Project (IGP) is to:

- Inform and shape Internet public policy choices by providing independent analysis and timely recommendations.
- Identify and analyze new possibilities for improving global governance institutions
- Develop policy positions guided by the values of globalism, democratic governance and individual rights.

The Internet is a public, global system of interconnected commercial, academic, household and government networks. Unlike most communications media, Internet technology is based on global, open and nonproprietary standards. The mix of open standards, diverse networks, and the growing ubiquity of digital devices makes the Internet a revolutionary force that undermines traditional media such as newspapers, broadcasting, and telephone systems, and challenges existing regulatory institutions based on national boundaries. Internet policy affects a wide range of social issues. It affects who gets to participate in the online economy. It affects intellectual property witness the attempts to control and regulate Internet-based communication in order to protect copyrights and trademarks. It determines who gets access to the key technical resources, such as domain names and IP addresses, that make Internet service possible. As a target of government surveillance, it affects privacy and civil liberties. It affects freedom of expression, forcing the world's diverse policies to be harmonized. It provokes debates over the global balance of power, as the US government holds unilateral control of Internet resources against the will of users and governments in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. Internet-based communication tools also enable new forms of global governance and new ways to participate in international institutions.

The blog has features such as [Home](#), [News](#), [Blog](#), [Events](#), [About](#), People, Publications, Press, Subscribe and Links.

For instance some of the issues they looked in and feel concern about includes the below:

- ICANN Cairo: Is anyone listening to the GNSO?
- The New Global Name Grab in Cairo
- ICANN web site is blocked in Egypt
- Economic analysis of Registry-registrar integration
- Bulgarian Group Challenges ICANN's restriction of IDNs to Governments
- Inaugural Address: "The Future of Freedom on the internet: Security, Privacy and Global Governance"
- Privacy by design?
- Commerce Department asks the world to comment on its plans to retain control of the root

Blog Three: [Brodie's Public Policy and Global Governance Blog](#)

Policy Net Blog (<http://www.igloo.org/brodieblog>)

The blog looks at current socio-political and economic issues across the globe and tries to find a global public view on the issue.

[Global Electoral College](#)

Recently the blog takes into account the American election. In one of its items [The Economist](#) released their take on what the outcome of the US Presidential election would be should the whole world vote. They have broken down the world into a Global Electoral College. Obama comes out as the undisputed winner of the election with 9,120 global electoral college votes to a mere 252 for McCain. Ever since the election campaign started it has appeared clear that the world tends to favour Barack Obama over John McCain.....the election outcome justified that assertion

[Obama is President... but I'm still holding my breath](#)

The unthinkable has occurred; Barack Obama is the 44th President of the United States of America. If you asked me who would have won the American election 6, 5, 4 even 3 months ago, I would have disappointedly replied, "John McCain." As much as Barack Obama appeared to be the right answer, I never thought that the American public would choose him. The day has come, Barack Obama is set to take the highest office in the land, but I am still holding my breath.

Deficit: A Four Letter Word

Since the events of the 1980s and 1990s, deficit has become a four letter word here in Canada. Much of the focus of the recent federal election campaign was centered on whether or not the candidates would have to run a deficit in order to weather the current financial storm. If there is one thing all the candidates agreed on, it was that they would not let Canada's balanced budget slip and start running a deficit. After all, tougher economic times mean that the government has less of a tax.

Greenspan on the logic of risk

Summary:"I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organizations, specifically banks and others, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms." - Alan Greenspan

Economic guru, Alan Greenspan let his thoughts be known at a congressional hearing examining the role of regulators in the current financial crisis. His assumption that banks and investment firms had an inherent self interest in mitigating risk to protect

themselves and their shareholders against something like the mess we are in now was probably not too far off. As an ardent free market advocate, Greenspan was likely proceeding on the logic that if left to their own devices, financial firms.

[Pembina Report Argues for Multiple Policy Options to Address Climate Change](#)

The Pembina Institute released its report on the policy response to climate change prepared for TD today. It argues that rather than focusing on finding a "silver bullet" cure for climate change, we need to start thinking about a suite of policies that will all contribute to keeping our atmosphere sustainable. While this is not a completely new line of thought or heavy on deep insight, there were some points that the 120 page report made quite nicely. The report argues that the key challenge in translating [...]

In the forum of the blog, members can post topics, comments, and replies to any Forum listed below. Forums are created by community facilitators in the Forums Administration Area. **Issues of discussion in the forum includes**

[Environment](#): Ban on Refrigerant.

Economy: US Inflation Numbers

Health: Kazakhstan's HIV

Society: Michael (Moore)

[Technology](#): [One Laptop Per Child ...](#)

[War and Security](#): Networks as the best form of global governance

[Regional Issues](#)

[Africa](#): [Is "Quiet diplomacy" ...](#)

Asia Pacific:

Europe,

Latin America: [Bush in Guatemala ...](#)

North America

[Virtual Seminars Series](#)

[Climate, Energy and Global Security - Thomas Homer-Dixon](#)

[Networks as the best form of global governance - Anne-Marie Slaughter](#)

Blog Four: World Hunger (<http://ifpriblog.org/>)

International Food Policy Research Institute

Sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty

Supported by the CGIAR

The blog basically tries to express the common view across the globe on solving global hunger particularly in the areas affected. It is an avenue where non-governmental views are scrutinized and discussed. The blog has an archive for current and past discussions on varieties of issues. Among the posted comment on the blog are:

- [Toward a New Global Governance System for Agriculture, Food, and Nutrition... What Are the Options?](#)
- [The Challenge of Hunger 2008](#)
- [International Day of Rural Women](#)
- [Global Food Crisis](#)
- [Social protection helps families cope with rising food prices](#)
- [Understanding Rural Poverty in Bangladesh](#)
- [World Water Week: Expanding Access to Irrigation in Africa](#)
- [Food and nutrition critical for AIDS treatment](#)
- [Strengthening Families Affected by HIV/AIDS and the Food Crisis](#)
- [IFPRI receives COM+ Communication Award for response to the food crisis](#)
- [World Food Day 2008: Implications of Climate Change and Bioenergy Demand for the World's Poor](#)

Blog Five: Escape the Illusion

(<http://www.escapetheillusion.com/blog/2008/10/dr-michael-coffman-global-warming-or-global-governance/>)

The blog owe to itself the task of challenging convention wisdom which in the view of the blog is an illusion created by the Empire or certain powerful helm operating in the global world order to furthering what it termed as global governance. The blog believes that issue like global warming is one of the projects of the global hegemon, hence calling on blog attendants to escape the illusion around them.

For instance on the issue of global warming, the blog believes that if you were to ask ten people on the street if mankind was causing **global warming**, at least eight out of ten would say yes. After all, **Al Gore's** Inconvenient Truth provides incontrovertible evidence that this is the case. Yet, contrary to what is heard in the **media**, there is overwhelming evidence that the warming we are experiencing is natural, with maybe a small amount contributed by man's activities. Nor is there any scientific consensus. The debate is still raging within the scientific community.

The blog under the title of **Sovereignty International** has put together interviews of **climate scientists** and biologists from numerous sources who explain, step by step, why **Al Gore** and the **global warming** alarmists are incorrect. In some cases, blatantly so. It also provides evidence that the **global warming** agenda is being funded with tens of billions of dollars as a mechanism to create **global governance**. Hear from congressmen, experts and even well-known news broadcasters how global governance puts global institutions that are not accountable to the American people in **control** of every aspect of our economy. The U.S. government is very close to making this a reality. Very close. Every American, every citizen of the world, needs to hear the other side of the global warming story.

Issues discussed and posted on the blog evolve around: Conspiracy, Corporations, Earth Changes, Global Warming, Weather

Muslims in Europe

Blog One: Daniel Pipes's blog

(<http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/comments/126894>)

Daniel Pipes has been a regular commentator of the Middle East and Muslims in Europe and United States. His blog expressing the fear over the rise of Muslims in Europe upon which there were vitriolic comments submitted by blog attendants supporting some of the view shared by Pipes. The blog equally has list of Pipes's books, articles, speeches and other related works on Muslim both in Europe and in the United States. However the blog

also is meant for all regardless of religion and most comments express the religiosity and leaning of the blog attendants. The blog also discusses the debate among Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals on Muslims in Europe and the United States, different discussants discuss these debates on the blog.

For instance discussing the growth of Muslims in European cities, the blog cited the statistics of another blog The "Islam in Europe". Based on the data blog discussant expressed their view.

Marseilles - 25 percent (200,000 of 800,000) (*)
Malmö - ~25 percent (67,000 of 270,000) (*)
Amsterdam - 24 percent (180,000 of 750,000) (*)
Stockholm - 20 percent (>155,000 of 771,038) (*)
Brussels - ~20 percent (some say 33 percent) (*)
Moscow - 16 percent-20 percent (2 million of 10-12 million) (*)
London - 17 percent (1.3 million of 7.5 million) (*)
Luton - 14.6 percent (26,963) (*)
Birmingham 14.3 percent (139,771) (*)
The Hague - 14.2 percent (67,896 of 475,580) (*)
Utrecht - 13.2 percent (38,300 of 289,000) (*)
Rotterdam - 13 percent (80,000 of 600,000) (*)
Copenhagen - 12.6 percent (63,000 of 500,000) (*)
Leicester - 11 percent (>30,000 of 280,000) (*)
Aarhus - ~10 percent (*)
Zaan district (Netherlands) - 8.8 percent (*)
Paris - 7.38 percent (155,000 of 2.1 million) (*)
Antwerp- 6.7 percent (>30,000 of >450,000) (*)
Hamburg - 6.4 percent (>110,000 of 1.73 million) (*)
Berlin - 5.9 percent (~200,000 of 3.40 million) (*)

Comments: (1) It is striking to note that many of the continent's largest cities – London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow – also have its largest Muslim populations; also, the capital cities are disproportionately represented. Also noteworthy is how, other than Marseilles, they are all northerly. (2) The above numbers do not indicate rates of growth; given the proportionately higher influx into Sweden than other countries, I'd put my money on Malmö or Stockholm being the first west European city with a Muslim majority, with Moscow as a wild card, given that Russian demographic dynamics are so different. (November 23, 2007)

Blog Two: tdaxp

<http://www.tdaxp.com/archive/2006/04/26/the-abortion-of-tolerable-european-islam.html>

The blog looks at different hot debate during a particular month and post comments from discussants. These discussions are placed into an archive among which are such issues mentioned below. However in its 2006 archive Muslim related issue in view of integration in Europe was discussed.

Archive for November, 2008
Change.gov:November 7th, 2008

The Office of the President-Elect, which no one has ever heard of before, has a new website: **Change.gov**.

Archive for October, 2008
China as a Leader: October 30th, 2008

Tom has a pretty good post on China's role in restarting the global financial system. Just as America stepped in to help Europe after the end of World War II, China is able to help America now. China will be a leader in more things than just finance. The quest to build electrical cars and free ourselves from foreign hydrocarbons will be largely financed by China, not just as investor, but as consumer:

The Next South Ossetia: Crimea: October 29th, 2008

Though South Ossetia is only recognized by Russia and Nicaragua, it has still allowed Russia to extend its influence by attacking neighboring states. South Ossetia, along with Abkhazia and Transnistria, are puppet entities supported by Russia. The next puppet state may well be Crimea, which is part of Ukraine:

Archive for September, 2008
Smoking gun: The Affirmative Action Financial Crisis

The Abortion of Tolerable European Islam: April 26th, 2006

Chirol's recent three part series on the Third World in the United States ([I](#), [II](#), and [III](#)) warn us of the dangers of importing dysfunctional cultures to the developed world. "Connectivity" is not the answer to cultures that been destroyed. Especially if the new host culture is its inflexible.

Blog Three: The Islam blog

(<http://www.theislamblog.com/>)

Looking at contemporary issue particularly as it concerns Muslims in Europe, the blog have a general discussion and categorizes its discussion into:

- Contemporary Issues (4)
- Global Warming Scam (2)
- Converts To Islam (6)
 - Creed (0)
- Divinity (2)
 - General (8)
 - Islamophobia (4)
 - Misconceptions (2)
 - Muslim History (2)
 - News** (2)
 - Non-Muslim Relations (6)
 - Politics (0)
- Middle East (1)
- Zionism (1)
 - Terrorism (7)
- Refuting Extremists (1)
- [Suicide Bombings](#) (2)
- [Understanding 9/11](#) (0)
- Women and Islam (5)
- The Hijab and Veil (1)
 - Women In Other Societies (3)
- World History (0)

It also has archive where previous issues can be retrieved. Comments often come from professionals and sometimes it carries newspaper articles regarding a particular issue of the month. Aside from the above category, the blog also discusses board issue under the heading General and Contemporary Issues and Women and Islam and Women in Other Societies

Blog Four: European Muslim Network

(<http://www.euromuslim.net/index.php/links/>)

The blog like every other of its kind has varieties of features with which information and discussion on the blog can be accessed. It also has an archive of past and current issues.

1. [Home](#)
 - a.
2. [News](#)
 - a. [General News](#)
 - b. [Press Review](#)
3. [Islam In Europe](#)
 - a. [Member Reports](#)
 - b. [EU Reports](#)
 - c. [Country Profile](#)
 - d. [Bibliography](#)
4. [Events](#)
5. [Links](#)
6. [About us](#)
 - a. [About EMN](#)
 - b. [Mission Statement](#)
 - c. [Board of Trustees](#)
 - d. [Contact](#)

Under the feature of **Islam in Europe**, there are four basic categories

- **Citizenship and Identity:** Citizenship in European Thought: An Overview
- **Education:** Hermeneutics in Islam in the midst of Text and Context
- **Religion and Public Sphere:** Models of State-Church Relations and Christian-Muslim perspectives
- **Women and Feminism**

Under the feature of **Links**, the blog makes known other related blogs operating in member countries or European countries within its purview.

"EMN" does not necessarily subscribe to the views and thoughts articulated and portrayed on the following websites. The links are offered to the interested reader as a first impression reflecting the variety of Muslim life in Europe.

- Albania
 - **The Muslim Forum of Albania**
- Austria
 - **Die Initiative muslimischer ÖsterreicherInnen**
 - **Die Stimme des Islam**
 - **Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich**

- Belgium
 - **Vereniging voor Ontwikkeling en Emancipatie van Moslims**
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
 - **Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo**
 - **Islamic fortnightly newspaper Preporod**
 - **The Presidency of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Rijaset)**
 - **Women Islamic organization Nahla**
- Europe
 - **Euro-Islam.info**
 - **Islam Online**
 - **Tariq Ramadan**
- France
 - **L'Association Culturelle de Saint-Étienne musulman**
 - **Oumma.com**
 - **SaphirNews**
 - **Union des Organisations islamique de France**
- Germany
 - **Association of Muslim Social Scientists - Germany**
 - **Deutsche Muslim Liga e.V.**
 - **Deutsche Muslim-Liga Bonn e.V.**
 - **Islam.de**
 - **Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs**
 - **Islamische Zeitung**
 - **Muslim gegen Terror**
 - **Muslime Helfen**
 - **Zentrum für Frauenforschung & -förderung**
- Great Britain
 - **British Muslim Initiative**
 - **Cageprisoners**
 - **Institute of Race Relations**
 - **Islam Channel**
 - **Islamic Human Right Commission**
 - **Islamophobia Watch**
 - **Muslim Association of Britain**
 - **Muslim Council of Britain**
- Italy
 - **Associazione Islamica Ahl-al-Bait Italia**
 - **Lega Musulmana Mondiale - Italia**
 - **Portale Islamico Italiano**
 - **Unione delle Comunità ed Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia**
- Macedonia
 - **Islamic Religious Community**
- Norway
 - **islam.no**
- Portugal

- **Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa**
- Spain
 - **Observatorio de la Islamofobia**

Blog Five: Islam in Europe

News and opinion about the Islamic Community in Europe

(<http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/>)

This blog operates in the same way (BPM) does although by narrowing observing the news items related to socio-cultural, economic and political condition of Muslims across Europe. Hence the blog has different category of issues in accordance to the need of blog attendants. For instance subjects mentioned below are discussed.

- Women
 - Criticism and reactions
 - Integration
 - Radicalism/terrorism
 - Studies/Surveys
 - Opinions
 - Shariah law
 - Crime
 - Education/Language
 - Immigration/Emigration
 - Mosques/Imams
 - English-language news
 - Translated News
 - Art/Culture
 - Other minorities
 - Anti-Muslim activities
 - Demographics
 - Honor related violence
 - Book reviews
 - Community news
 - Other:

Among related news items or headlines posted on the blog comes from different newspapers across Europe.

- France: Going out with non-Muslims
- Denmark: Bashy Quraishy bashes Denmark, attacked by Khader
- FIOE (President of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe) letter to Obama

- Third Anniversary of Islam in Europe Blog
- Norway: One-time-use hijabs in Nortura, which produces egg and meat products.
- Germany: Attacks on Jews, Muslim cemetery
- Russia: Muslims should copy from Jewish lobbying
- Sweden: Muslim show stirs controversy
- UK: New airline catering to Muslims
- Austria: Headscarfs for public employees debate
- UK: International terrorists
- Dutch terror suspect appears in court
- London: Police chef sues for having to handle pork
- Oxford: Council axes Christmas, Muslims object
- UK: Muslim artist gets death threats
- Italy: Shia Muslims to commemorate Fiat heir

Blog Six: European Muslim Blog

(<http://europeanmuslim.blog.com/>)

The blog is a complement to other blogs as it shouldered upon itself contentious issues confronting the Muslim community across Europe. The blog is archived with issues as related to discussants and blog attendants. Presently on the blog issues mentioned below are posted for discussion and comments.

- Muslims of Europe Conference: Recommendations
- Muslims in quandary...why Muslims have failed to condemn terrorist act across Europe
- Tariq Ramadan...A confident, modern Islam must challenge the victim mentality of western Muslims and a crisis of authority across the faith, says Tariq Ramadan in an interview with *Prospect* magazine.
- Radical steps to counter radical Islam...London bombers are misinformed and it is based The problem is not primarily rooted in socio-economic deprivation: it is based on a global ideology motivated by political grievances and justified by a mistaken interpretation of Islam.”

- Europe's Angry Young Muslims (Part I-III)...A failure of integration? - In the third and final part of his series about young Muslims in Europe, Roger Hardy visits a reputed hub of Islamic radicalism.

Blog Seven: EMU...The European Foundation

(<http://www.emunion.org/>)

The blog is quite selective as it looks into the affairs of five European countries, Spain, Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Germany. It is however a non-profit, non-government organization, registered in the European Union and with scope of activity throughout the European Continent.

The EMU will be an umbrella organization made up of various other organizations and area entities associated together to serve the Muslim community in Europe and to promote and facilitate the dialogue and mutual improvement of the host societies and the Muslims, where the Muslim communities live in minority.

Objectives of EMU are:

1. To promote correct understanding of Islam in Europe.
2. To educate the Muslims in the traditional teachings of Islam, free from fanaticism, nihilism and other negative tendencies.
3. To promote the creation and management of all the institutions needed for the practice of worship (Mosques) and all the necessities of the practice of Islam in a non-Muslim society: cemeteries, Halal slaughter houses, Kuttab (children Quranic school),... etc.
4. To favour a positive, beneficial and constructive role of the Muslim communities and Muslim entities in European societies.
5. To provide reliable sources of thought, judgement, advice, clarification, mediation and arbitration for Muslims in different circumstances of crisis, whether conflict within the Muslim community or with the host society.
6. To provide material, legal, social and spiritual support to Muslims from foreign origin in the European continent.
7. To provide forums and arenas of encounter, mutual knowledge and dialogue between Muslim leaders and intellectuals from the Muslim community and the European and western countries.
8. To create welfare and social services for the Muslim community all over Europe.
9. To form and run Muslim schools and other educational institutions for the betterment and development of Muslim children and youth in Europe.
10. To serve the European public in general and the Muslim population in particular by offering news, knowledge, opinion and thought with a balanced and correct

view of Islam, the Muslims in Europe and the Muslim world through all the media of mass communication.

11. To develop and run institutions of higher Islamic knowledge, destined to form and train Muslim scholars and intellectual capable of serving the Muslim communities and providing righteous guidance in the European context of this age, aware of the challenges, needs and existing realities of the environment to which they belong.
12. To facilitate mutual knowledge between Europeans and Muslims around the world by means of tourism, travelling and camps, as well as through courses, exhibitions and promotion of the arts, crafts, heritage and culture of those communities.
13. To develop projects of social interest for the creation of employment, professional training of different skills and trading where the specific models and formulas of Islamic law of commerce can be implemented and shown as a valid alternative.

The EMU has its headquarters at an European city which can be changed by consensus of the Board of Directors (Granada, Sarajevo, Istanbul etc.).

Like every other blog with features EMU also has

- About us
- EMU Activities
- News and Reports
- Membership
- Press
- Youth
- Mosques & Market
- Media
- Auqaf
- Knowledge
- Contact us

Under the feature of Press items mentioned below are posted

1. Britain should withdraw the award of Knighthood given to Salman Rushdie.
2. Combating racial inequalities is key to speeding the integration of minority communities in Europe says EUMC
3. Response of the EMU on Occasion of the Unrest in France:
4. EMU Statement on the Terrorist Acts in London: There is no justification for terrorist acts in Islam - the terrorist acts in London are merely criminal in their nature.
5. Council of Europe - Warsaw Declaration

Blog Eight: Euro-Islam

(http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=1)

This blog is more intellectual than other blogs as it handles Muslim related issue more scholarly and works to finding solution from an academic standpoint. The blog operates under eminent European intellectuals along with their researchers preoccupied with the issue of Islam, Muslims in Europe and other faiths within European context.

Euro-Islam Group Members includes Jocelyne Cesari, particularly in charge of research on Islam in France, through a research group composed of Alexandre Caiero, Claire Guerard, Julie Hieber, Moussa Khedimellah and Omero Marungiu. The affiliation with l'École Pratique des Hautes Études - La Sorbonne is an opportunity for GSRL to get access to the intellectual and administrative resources of the most renowned academic institution in the field of religious studies.

Professors and Researchers:

- Florence Bergeaud-Blackler
- Christine Cadot
- Jocelyne Cesari
- Anna Lisa Frisina
- H.A. Hellyer
- Jonathan Laurence
- Tuomas Martikainen
- Jonas Otterbeck
- Garbi Schmidt
- Cláudia Sofia Lemos de Carvalho Bastos Martins
- Sara Silvestri
- Mallory Schneuwly Purdie

Euro-Islam PhD Group:

- Samir Amghar
- Mounir Azaoui
- Kilian Baltz
- Amel Boubekour
- Alexandre Caeiro
- Peter Dewan
- Farid Hafez
- Julia Maria Anna Theresa Georgia Hieber
- Simon Hull
- Hale Oner Keifer
- Moussa Khedimellah
- Radwa Khorshid
- Marcel Maussen

- David Motadel
- Tim Peace
- Konrad Pedziwiatr
- Jennifer Selby
- Mark Somos
- Riem Spielhaus
- Eren Tatari
- Sonia Tebbakh

Features of the Blog: Home, Issue, Country profile, News, Recent Publications, Our research, Bibliography, Events, Contact, links and Newsletter

Under Issues

- Fitna - Dutch Anti-Koran Film

The following issues are in the pipeline

- Education
- Immigration
- Interfaith Dialogue
- Security and Anti-Terrorism
- Shari'a

Research

Our Current Research
Our Past Research (2001-2003)
Workshop, colloquia and symposia

Euro-Islam.info website is part of the Challenge Project.

The CHALLENGE project responds to widespread concerns about the resort to specific illiberal practices by contemporary liberal regimes. «The Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security», is a European Commission-funded project that seeks to facilitate a more responsive and responsible assessment of rules and practices of security. These practices are linked with the identification of increasing insecurities globally, insecurities that are widely interpreted as obliging sterner policies from the authorities and, consequently, new constraints on principles of liberty under law and presumptions about the innocence of individuals. Specifically, the project examines tensions created by claims that 'security is the first freedom' and that a new 'balance' has to be established to manage the global scale of contemporary dangers. The 9/11 terrorist attacks have

modified the traditional dilemma of balancing security and civil liberties in liberal democracies. Since the attacks, security has been defined as the main priority at both the national and European levels. The increased political focus on danger and the necessity of protecting citizens has made many concerns about freedom and civil liberties secondary.

Challenge Project with the cooperation of Euro-Islam has issues many reports among which are:

- Muslims In Western Europe After 9/11: Why the term Islamophobia is more a predicament than an explanation
- Abstracts of the Challenge Annual Conference: Illiberal practices of Liberal Regimes, Paris, June 9th 2006.
- Terrorism and Community Relations inquiry.
- Securitization and Religious Divides in Europe. State of the Art by Jocelyne Cesari and Peter DeWan –

Past Research

Muslim presence in European urban space
Islam, citizenship & European Integration

Workshops, colloquia and symposia

European Muslims and the Secular State in a Comparative Perspective

La Sorbonne - June 30-July 1, 2003

Islam in European Cities

Iresco - December 11-12, 2001

Islam in European Cities

IRESKO, December 11-12, 2001

Islam, Citizenship and European Integration

La Sorbonne, June 22, 23, 2002

Islam, Citizenship and European Integration

La Sorbonne, June 22-June 23, 2002

Muslims in Europe and in the United States. A Transatlantic Comparison

Center for European Studies, Harvard University - December 15-16, 2006

The Integration of Muslim Migrants in Europe: Religious and Political Aspects in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001

La Sorbonne, February 3, 2002

The Social building of Muslim Communities in Europe

La Sorbonne - June 11, 2001

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: November 19, 2008

Europe, North America and Rest of the World

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From 9th-15th November 2008

UN General Assembly's Culture for Peace Conference held on the fringes of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly.

Background

This report addresses the initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia who aimed at promoting peace across the globe and among various religions regardless of their region. Recently although the United Nations hosted an international Peace Conference that was attended by political and religious leaders across the world, but such wouldn't have been possible without the Madrid meeting. It is important to note that the initiative was championed by the Saudi king along with his counterpart (king) of Spain. They both sponsored the Madrid Dialogue Conference held in July 2008. Hence the recent UN Peace Conference was no doubt convened on the request by King Abdullah, under agenda item 45 "Culture of peace" in order to inform the General Assembly of the process initiated at the Madrid Dialogue Conference.

In fact the UN already shouldered an effort aimed at bridging the gaps among civilization termed as the Dialogue among Civilization. But the recent conference further proves the point that the World is searching for a mutual understanding and ways of solving the looming and contentious problems facing mankind.

In this vein, the N General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann sent invitations to 192 member countries and observers to attend the conference, which it called a "useful preparatory step" toward an interfaith and intercultural meeting to be held in 2010.

This noble effort spearheaded by Saudi remains contentious as some angles across the world hold certain reservation to the initiative. Regardless of the positive aspects of the interfaith dialogue conference, some dismissed the meeting as a public relations (PR) exercise. The reason being that Saudi Arabia has aimed to boost its global image after the September 11, 2001 attacks in which 15 of the 19 Al Qaida militants who destroyed New York's Twin Towers were Saudi Arabians. Human rights groups, which maintain that Saudi Arabia is among the world's least tolerant countries, have voiced reservations about the interfaith initiative. European governments also expressed concern over recent attempts by Islamic governments to stifle criticism of Islam, even in the West. "Freedom of religion cannot be achieved without freedom of speech, even if it is sometimes used to express derision," said former French Prime Minister Alain Juppé, speaking on behalf of

the European Union. In the similar vein certain Saudi clerics have shown scant support for the initiatives and three prominent figures declined to comment on them.

In spite the reservations, others have hailed King Abdullah, for promoting such initiative and has dismissed idea that Saudi Arabia is not moderate. Perhaps the king's effort shows that Saudi Arabia can deal with the rest of the world as he met Pope Benedict in the Vatican last year, brought Sunni and Shiite clerics to Makkah in March, jointly convened the Madrid Dialogue Conference (July) with Spanish King and on his behest the UN called for a Culture for Peace Conference held on the fringes of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly.

At the Madrid Dialogue Conference

The Madrid conference was held 16-18 July 2008, organized by the Muslim World League at the initiative of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, the three-day long "International Conference for Dialogue" is gathering some 200 participants representing Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism.

Abdullah opened the conference with a speech reminding all attendants what mutually binds them, "If we want this historic encounter to succeed, we must look to the things that unite us: our profound faith in God, the noble principles and elevated ethics that represent the foundation of religions,"

One of the participants is ex-British Prime Minister Tony Blair, a hate figure for many Muslims because of his key role in the Iraq war. Mr. Blair, who has made interfaith work one of his priorities since leaving office, told reporters today that without co-existence among the religions, world peace would be very difficult to sustain.

Islam is the official state religion of Saudi Arabia, while non-Muslim religious services and symbols are banned within the kingdom's territory. This has led to accusations of appeasement and hypocrisy by civil rights groups. Blair spoke of the possibility of a Catholic Church being allowed in the Saudi kingdom. For Protestants and other religious groups, prospects of recognition are thin, however

Tony Blair said that there was a "glimmer" of change signaled by King Abdullah's role at the event, however, and that the meeting was part of a long and difficult process of encouraging global religious freedom and dialogue. "This king has made a lot of reforms,"... "The fact that this conference is happening with the king, and with religious leaders of all different faiths, is significant."

His message echoes that of leading Catholic theologian Hans Kung, whose Global Ethics Foundation seeks to bring together people of goodwill from different backgrounds and beliefs.

The World Council of Churches was represented at the event by one of its presidents, Patriarch Abune Paulos, head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and by

Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of France, from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Rabbi Burton Visotzky of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary said "To see King Abdullah come and sit in a room with Christians, Jews, and other religious leaders, it is a moment in Islam much like what Vatican II was for the Catholic theology," referring to the 1962-1965 council at which the Vatican recognized the validity of other religions.

"It's a major step," agrees the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the American civil rights leader and a conference delegate. "For the king to use his moral authority to convene this session, to work for common ground – that's a very big step."

However some blamed the Madrid conference of partiality in that it failed to invite any Israeli and Palestine, however it was otherwise thought that such scenario further expresses the position of Saudi Arabia to stay aloof from political issues. Veteran interfaith activist Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee, who, though Israeli, is listed in conference literature as an American representative observed "They clearly didn't want to focus on Israeli-Palestinian issues," Rosen said, highlighting the stated Saudi goal of keeping political issues - including the Iranian nuclear program and other sensitive matters - far from the closed-door discussions in Madrid.

According to the participants, the conference showed that the Saudis were not used to interfaith diplomacy. "It's clear from the organization that they've never done this sort of thing before," said Rosen, adding that the Saudis did not seem to know who would be appropriate to invite and who not.

For example, said Rabbi Marc Schneier of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and the World Jewish Congress, the Saudi government invited Natorei Karta's Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss, a persona non-grata in much of the Jewish world after his attendance of a Holocaust denial conference in Teheran in 2006.

Saudi Ambassador to Spain Saud bin Naif bin Abdulaziz al-Saud said "Spain's historic role as an important bridge between cultures," ... "To have a dialogue, just to start talking to each other, is an accomplishment in itself," "At this point in time, the whole world needs to start talking to each other. This is what we hope we can achieve."

For Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership in New York, the conference was like a baby taking its first steps. "On the one hand, it's the most ordinary moment in the world," he says. "And on the other, it's the most important. But what matters is what the baby does next."

The bottom-line overall assessment of the Madrid conference was that Saudi Arabia lacks the proper organization of an interfaith summit and was very much cautious not to irk its religiosity. Although some critics believed it was a public stunt for the Saudi yet even if the Saudi initiative was mediocre and as Rabbi Brad Hirschfield said “it's the most important. But what matters is what the baby does next.” The Saudis have shown that acting like baby could be the first step but that can rather do better as an adult by further initiating the UN General Assembly's Culture for Peace Conference

At the UN General Assembly's Culture for Peace Conference

In his opening remarks, **Secretary-General Ban** said new divisions could emerge in today's world as economies merged, cultural boundaries disappeared and new media brought societies closer together. “And indeed, we are seeing some troubling phenomena,” he said, noting, among others, that communal strife was intensifying; extremist ideologies were on the rise; and societies were more polarized.

Yet, he said that while anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other kinds of faith-based discrimination and racism were showing a “dismaying persistence”, interfaith initiatives were a way to ensure that the world's rich cultural diversity made the world more secure and peaceful -- not less.

In his address to the Assembly, **King Abdullah** said that throughout history, differences between followers of religions and cultures had engendered intolerance, causing devastating wars and bloodshed without any sound logical or ideological justification. It was time to learn from the harsh lessons of the past and agree on ethics and ideals in which everyone believed, he said. He invited the Madrid Conference participants to elect a committee that would conduct a future dialogue. Saudi Arabia's concern for an ongoing discourse stemmed from Islamic faith and values and compassion for human conditions. The country would continue to extend its hand to everyone advocating peace, justice and tolerance.

The Madrid report main thrust was the need to promote understanding and tolerance among followers of the world's faiths, and on the dual needs to combat terrorism and propaganda on the “clash of civilizations”. The report says that some 200 clerics, academics, and experts representing diverse creeds and belief systems from around the world took part in the Conference. Appropriate modalities for a follow-up to the Conference are being finalized. The report concludes that, given the growing number of actors involved in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and difficulty of reflecting in a comprehensive manner on new initiatives, the Assembly might focus its future

request for reporting on the preparations of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) by the United Nations and other major international actors.

General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto of Nicaragua asked Member States to choose between allowing behaviour such as selfishness and unbridled greed to dominate societies and acting to ensure that solidarity and social responsibility become the guiding principles. One of today's most pressing problems was the shameful reality that half of humanity lived at levels of hunger, malnutrition and poverty that were incompatible with their inherent dignity and rights.

The United Nations had the opportunity to include the values of past prophets, saints and sages in its work, he added. The upcoming High-level Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development, scheduled for Doha, Qatar, in two weeks, would be filled with references to ideals such as justice, peace and tolerance. "We know that nothing short of heroic decisions and actions can awaken us from our moral coma," he declared urging delegates to let solidarity be the "star" at the conference as they strove for peace and addressed the ongoing financial crisis.

GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO, President of the Philippines, recalled the World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid in July, saying that event had brought together Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and representatives of other religions, in the hope of promoting tolerance among followers of the world's faiths.

Introducing a draft resolution on "promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace", the Philippines' President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said one of the resolution's most relevant points was the affirmation that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue were important components of the culture of peace. The draft was especially relevant to the United Nations as the Secretary-General had issued a report on interreligious and intercultural activities for the first time in the Organization's history. The resolution also asked that a United Nations decade be proclaimed for interreligious dialogue. Noting that her country chaired the first United Nations Summit on Interfaith Dialogue three years ago, she said the Philippines' participation in the present initiative improved its relationship with Middle Eastern and Islamic nations. "What we are doing together here today and tomorrow is every bit more powerful than bullets", she said.

SHEIKH SABAH AL-AHMAD AL-JABER AL-SABAH, Amir of Kuwait, stated that the Assembly had gathered today to “foster the peace and the good of humanity” through dialogue and understanding. It had gathered to consolidate relationships in the face of increasingly diverse and intense global challenges, such as new conflicts and civil wars, which had resulted from failures to resolve political issues in many parts of the world. He highlighted threats such as terrorism, drugs and discrimination, along with the prevalence of fanaticism and hatred, which had “shaken the foundations of global stability”. Therefore, he called for a careful examination of “our painful reality” through serious, sincere dialogue between people, religions and cultures; a focus of efforts on the consolidation of religious and moral values and the common, underlying principles of all religions. He encouraged intellectual leaders of the followers of the divine religions and other beliefs to start the dialogue, in which the United Nations played a catalytic role, by designating the year 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and adopting a resolution to consider 2010 as the Year of Rapprochement among Cultures. For Kuwait’s part, it had founded an international centre for moderation, and its Government agencies have created programmes for all segments of society to raise awareness. Kuwait had also held many regional and international conferences about moderation in Islam, religious tolerance, respect for followers of other religions and refusal to offend religious symbols, among many measures, he said.

Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue of the Holy See, extended the regards of Pope Benedict XVI, who said the gathering was needed by the international community. “The United Nations must be a school for peace”, said Cardinal Tauran, adding that all Member States were equal at the United Nations.

“The United Nations must be a school for peace”, he stated, as it was a place in the world where all Member States were equal. The daily debate only increased the sentiment of belonging to the same global family. He noted that believers had their place in their society, as the prayers of believers practiced solidarity, taught peace, and offered trust before judging. These attitudes educated people to allow peace to flourish.

The final declaration at the Madrid Conference had been the result of such shared beliefs and dialogue. Dialogue was essential to life as it was the way people became acquainted with one another. He offered, in his conclusion to the Assembly, that brotherhood and prayer lead the way to a safer world. “Make brotherhood not just an ideal, but a reality,” he said.

MOHAMMAD SAED TANTAWY, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Egypt, said that when talking of the culture of peace in Islam, Muslims talked about positive dialogue among civilizations, religions and cultures, and he offered nine realities of faith and human nature. All people were created by God to cooperate with one another with virtue and piety, not transgression and aggression. “No Arab is better than a non-Arab, except by piety,” he said, quoting from the Koran. The reality was that differences in beliefs and ideas were human nature. Imposing beliefs on one another only created hypocrites, not true believers.

However, he went on to say, differences in beliefs did not preclude cooperation, mutual understanding, friendliness or an exchange of benefits sanctioned by God. There were two common cornerstones revealed to the messengers of God: to worship God alone with devotion, and to maintain good manners. He said that the good word worked equally with friends and non-friends. Justice was a virtue, he continued, quoting the scripture that “when you judge between people, you judge with justice [...] and when you speak, then be just”, and he called to the Assembly to stand strong against the crimes of injustice until justice prevailed.

SHIMON PERES, President of Israel, recalled that 13 years ago, this week, his friend and partner, then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated, “while singing a song of peace”. However, he went on to say, “Assassins may take a life, but they cannot kill a dream.” He reminded the Assembly that during that time, many Arab and Muslim leaders had joined Israel in its grief, allowing tragedy to unite across boundaries and borders, and illuminate the shared goals of peace and fraternity.

The first call to peace between brothers, he said, was Abraham to his nephew Lot. “Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.” Furthermore, a basic tenet of religious faith was that man was created in God’s image, he stated, and to harm a man was to harm God. Thus the agenda of nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and terrorism, among others, needed to be changed. World leaders from regions of religious conflict reiterated the call for a culture of peace. “Israel is ready for peace,” said Israeli President Shimon Peres. Regardless of the results of the upcoming elections, he stressed the Israeli Government’s commitment to continue peace negotiations with the Palestinians and the recent explorations of peace with Syria. As it renewed faith and strengthened dialogue among nations, the High-Level meeting could spark a profound worldwide move toward reconciliation.

Speaking directly to King Abdullah, he said, “Your Majesty, the King of Saudi Arabia, I was listening to your message. I wish that your voice will become the prevailing voice of the whole region, of all people. It’s right. It’s needed.”

MICHEL SLEIMAN, President of the Republic of Lebanon, said today's meeting bore particular importance, as it was a high-level response to the peace and dialogue process launched last July by the King of Saudi Arabia in Madrid, Spain. States' common interest in the invitation to dialogue was compounded by heightened fears around the extremism of those who exploited religious emotions to fuel power struggles. That interest had grown as a result of concern at events characterized by ethnic violence,

Lebanese President Michel Suleiman said turning to dialogue to settle existing conflicts, or defuse simmering ones, would not yield results unless trust had been woven into the process. Ongoing oppression questioned the credibility of any dialogue, which was primarily true in the Arab Levant and Holy Land, and he questioned how dialogue could flourish when Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories persisted.

Salam Fayyad, Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority, said tolerance and coexistence among religions could only be promoted if dialogue aimed at achieving peace was deepened. He called on all Member States to uphold these core principles and create a culture of tolerance that maintained the right to religious belief and human dignity. "The people of Palestine, Muslims and Christians, aspire to peace and justice and are committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence," and he pledged to continue to work for a lasting peace based on justice and respect for all rights so that, rather than being a victim of history, the Palestinian people could become a participant of history. However, to speak of religious tolerance he needed to speak of the city of Jerusalem, a city of some of the holiest shrines of Christianity and Islam. Occupation of Jerusalem over the last four decades had altered the character and status of the Holy City through the harassment of its Palestinian, Christian and Muslim citizens. The Security Council and General Assembly, as well as other United Nations organs, had adopted numerous resolutions which challenged measures taken by Israel, making void its laws and jurisdiction. However, none of those resolutions had been implemented and he called for the international community to give Jerusalem and its inhabitants the support necessary to address illegal practices that impeded on the principles of justice and rules of international law. Doing so would ease tensions and fears of the citizens and enhance dialogue toward the achievement of freedom, peace and tolerance.

If the suffering of the Palestinian people continued unabated -- from their displacement and living in exile, to the confiscation of their land, water and resources -- he stated, the international efforts to establish peace on a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders would be jeopardized, and he urged the international community to support the Arab Peace Initiative which provided broad prospects to end the conflicts and establish peace and harmony. Recalling that the late President Yasser Arafat had "raised the olive

branch [...] which is deeply rooted in our land as a symbol of coexistence and tolerance”, he reaffirmed both Arafat’s message and the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine. “The people of Palestine, Muslims and Christians, aspire to peace and justice and are committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence,” he said, and pledged to continue to work for a lasting peace based on justice and respect for all rights so that, rather than being a victim of history, the Palestinian people could become a participant of history.

Disavowing extremism and isolation, **KING ABDULLAH BIN AL HUSSEIN of Jordan** stated that today’s dialogue was being conducted on a “solid basis”, with the goals of maximizing common ground for religious followers, and advancing mutual recognition of the roles of each religion and culture in contributions to human civilization through the ages. He noted that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had held a landmark meeting with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, and had then convened the Mecca and Madrid conferences, thereby starting the process of breaking down barriers between religions that led up to the discussions today. In Jordan, interfaith dialogue and understanding had been made priorities. The Amman Message, an explanation of Islam and a call for peaceful coexistence, had been endorsed by the Organization of Islamic States, and was supported by over 500 leading Muslim scholars. Another initiative was “A Common Word”, which involved exploring common ground between Christianity and Islam. A global dialogue was sought in those endeavours towards peace, and today’s summit showed the high-level priority for support for such discussions. He expressed hope that the next step would be to advance dialogue from the conference rooms into homes, schools, offices and lives.

Meanwhile, he said, extremists of all religions -- Muslim, Christian and Jewish -- were thriving on the doubts and divisions. Justice, respect for international law, and the right of all peoples to live in dignity were deep, shared values that could possibly bring a peaceful end, along with improved communication and the support of youth, who are “vital to success”, he said.

TARJA HALONEN, President of Finland, said that with the advent of globalization, the importance of national borders had decreased. Globalization had brought about more human contact, and in today’s world, different people, cultures, civilizations and faiths encountered each other every day. People had different opinions and beliefs. Increased interaction could promote understanding among people, but it could also strengthen prejudices and stereotypes. Attention was needed from all Member States. While the political leaders of a country could not shoulder the entire responsibility, encouragement and guidance were needed.

The dispute between Israel and the Palestinians was often mentioned as a key issue, symbolizing the breach between the West and the Muslim world. Finland

welcomed and supported serious initiatives to solve that dispute. While it was generally acknowledged that any solution must be based on a two-State model, and on reaching agreement on the status of Palestinian refugees and on Jerusalem, there was, nevertheless, no instant formula for peace.

Finding a solution required negotiations, which were always influenced by national and international political situations. She said Finland considered it self-evident that Israel must immediately cease building settlements, and that the Palestinians must cease their violent attacks on Israeli targets. Other countries and organizations should, above all, support the negotiations and refrain from doing anything that hindered them.

ALAIN JUPPÉ, former Prime Minister and Special Envoy of the President of France, speaking on behalf of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, thanked King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who had taken the commendable initiative of fostering dialogue among religions. The Saudi leader had called on believers to find common ground rather than divergence, and that initiative was warmly welcomed. France fully supported interfaith dialogue for various reasons, notably because, through its own experience since the 1789 Revolution, it had developed a concept of secularism aimed at organizing the peaceful coexistence of beliefs and non-beliefs. Among the permanent goals of French diplomacy, especially since “9/11”, was to prevent the convergence of factors which would support the idea of a clash of civilizations. France formally challenged that idea.

Speaking next on behalf of the European Union, he said Europeans, who had a long history of religious war, decided to encourage intercultural and interfaith dialogue, particularly as notions of tolerance were at the heart of European identity. Europe fully supported the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, led by Spain and Turkey at the United Nations, and although Europeans believed that faith was a question of individual choice, religious communities could play an essential role in furthering dialogue and fraternity. Such dialogue should be as broad as possible, and compliance with the values outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a “vital pillar” on which to build it.

HAMID KARZAI, President of Afghanistan, said there was nothing more important than eliminating the scourge of extremism, xenophobia and hatred, and that was only possible through dialogue and cooperation. Today’s meeting was meant to affirm that all religions nurtured humankind’s inner desire for peace and self-realization. Conflict or confrontations had not stemmed from religion, but the pursuit of narrow political objectives of certain adherents of many religions or every political ideology.

While pointing out the political nature of today's terrorism, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai said his country had emerged as a powerful example of genuine cooperation among civilizations over the past seven years. Countries around the globe, from Europe to the Mideast to Asia and the United States, were supporting efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. Today's meeting would help affirm that all religions nurtured people's inner desire for peace. Conflict did not stem from religion, but the pursuit of narrow political objectives by certain adherents of religions or political ideologies.

Over the past seven years, Afghanistan had been a powerful case for the prospect of genuine cooperation among civilizations aimed at achieving common goals. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, United States, European Union, Japan, China, India, United Arab Emirates, Iran and Pakistan were supporting efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. The future of a peaceful world rested in the extent to which cooperation among civilizations, as shown in Afghanistan, could become the rule and not the exception, he said, adding: "We must all remember the words of our Holy Books, and we must conquer our basic instincts for fear and hatred."

SHEIKH HAMAD BIN JASSIM BIN JABR AL THANI, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, thanking the King of Saudi Arabia for convening today's high-level meeting, said dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions was among the most prominent issues recommended in the outcome document of the Assembly's 2005 World Summit, at which States unanimously agreed that furthering international relations was the only means to fight extremism. Indeed, dialogue had become a central policy pillar at national, regional and international levels for achieving peace and sustainable development.

For its part, Qatar's values of tolerance for various religions had become the foundation for its policy, which was guided by the tolerant Islamic Sharia. Qatar viewed interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a strategic choice that urgently required the creation of an open space to ensure peace among the world's peoples. His country had been keen, since 2003, to host the Doha Conference on Interreligious Dialogue on an annual basis. He regretted that various tendencies fuelled interreligious intolerance and only escalated confrontation, especially as they undermined a "process of awakening" based on understanding. He urged moving from dialogue to action, saying that Qatar fully agreed with the recommendations of the Madrid Conference, most notably on the need to set global rules for dialogue, with a view to agreeing on the moral principles that represented the common denominator among peoples.

ABBAS EL FASSI, Prime Minister of Morocco, celebrated the gathering of such an important interfaith meeting and thanked King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for his efforts to promote such an important and constructive dialogue among faiths and nations. The encouragement of such dialogue, begun at the Madrid conference in July, had strengthened “the fundamentals of communication between the representatives of all faiths, reinforcing international cooperation with a view to ensuring spiritual security and peaceful coexistence in our societies”, he stated in his opening remarks.

As technology transformed and, at times, diminished borders throughout the global community, Morocco had placed great emphasis on regional and international interfaith and intercultural dialogues as a response to the often-destructive ethnic and religious extremism experienced in so many regions of the world. He said that following the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001, His Majesty King Mohammed VI called for a permanent and strategic dialogue among States, focusing on establishing peace and respect “without distinction between ethnicity, religions and cultures”.

He said Morocco’s King had also made great efforts toward creating a successful and lasting peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, calling for the creation of a sovereign State, side-by-side with Israel with Al Qods as capital.

DILEITA MOHAMED DILEITA, Prime Minister of Djibouti, said it was with a tremendous sense of honour he took the floor today to participate in the high-level meeting. The culture of peace, which had been on the Assembly’s agenda since its fifty-second session, was among the most crucial themes for the international community, and he supported the unprecedented initiative put forward by the King of Saudi Arabia, as it formed a dialogue among followers of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, among other faiths, and demonstrated genuine desire to reconcile differences.

Turning to Islam, a religion of peace, he said the faith today was associated with international terrorism, a barbaric phenomenon which required collective effort to combat. While convinced of the need to combat terrorism and all its aspects, he urged overcoming the phobia about things associated with Islam. States must do all to prove that accusations against the religion were unjustified. Indeed, the Koran advocated love - - not hate -- as well as coexistence and respect. Continuing, he said humanity was suffering from a loss of values, and going through a difficult phase in which distrust prevailed. The main cause was ignorance, which created a “fear of the other”, and he urged using education and dialogue as weapons for overcoming the distortion of religious messages and concepts.

Moral integrity of speech and action, tolerance, and the quest for virtue and wisdom were universal values, he said, urging concentrating on a belief in those noble principles that were the foundation of all religions.

KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, asserted that the various States and religions coming together at the conference were all motivated by the noble ideal to hold an open dialogue among cultures and religions with the simple and clear common goal of building a more secure and stable world. Noting that the current situation in the world was complex and controversial, he said Kazakhstan regretted the news of the latest victims of terrorism, wars, and conflicts arising from xenophobia, religious intolerance and civilizational contradictions. At the same time, current global challenges ignored racial, ethnic or religious differences and posed threats that affected equally all nations and peoples striving to live in peace and harmony. In his view, there was no alternative to mutual understanding, respect and tolerance. The time had come for statesmen and religious leaders everywhere to come together to make those principles a reality, he said, adding: “We will be unable to protect the world from violence and chaos unless joint efforts are undertaken.” He said no nation would ever give up its historic, spiritual and cultural identity, as it was the right and natural tendency. Thus, every culture, not to mention religion, had a legitimate right to freely exist and to be mutually respected. Also in that regard, Kazakhstan, as a nation where many ethnic groups and religions had been successfully coexisting for centuries, stood ready to contribute to the development of the global dialogue of religions and cultures.

ELIZABETA KANCESKA-MILEVSKA, Minister of Culture of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, thanking the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for initiating today’s gathering, reminded delegates that last September in the Assembly, she had told them that the core of the country’s cultural tradition was its openness towards other cultures. Despite various challenges, she trusted it would provide an excellent example of how intercultural, inter-ethnic and interreligious dialogue could be promoted at the national level. In that context, she said that last year, the country had hosted the World Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Civilizations, at which hundreds of political and religious leaders had openly discussed how to generate political will to eliminate common stereotypes, including through establishing new channels of communication. A follow-up conference would be held in 2010.

She stressed the importance that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia attached to the Alliance of Civilizations, saying that all present today were aware of the need to strengthen political action to deal with division, and deviations from the United Nations Charter, among other fundamental human rights instruments. With that, she reaffirmed support for the Alliance’s goals.

E. AHAMED, Minister of State for External Affairs of India, said every one of the world's major religions had a home in his country, making it a nation of unparalleled diversity. Islam had flourished on the subcontinent for over 1,300 years, and there were now 150 million "Ummah" among the population. In other words, one Muslim in every ten, worldwide, was an Indian. Christianity came to India shortly after its founding, while Jewish and Zoroastrian people had an ancient history of freely practicing their faiths in India. He said dialogue was a historical tradition in India, and it drew upon respect for knowledge, willingness to question and desire to learn. It was in the absence of such dialogue leading to understanding that intolerance, bigotry and violence flourished. One reason why extremist ideologies, violence and terrorism had grown was the lack of dialogue, because there was no disputing that terrorism, as a manifestation of extremism, intolerance and violence, was the antithesis to all religions. The central teachings of all religions were based on the universal values of peace, goodness and humanity. "No religion condones violence or the killing of human beings."

CARLOS MORALES TRONCOSO (Dominican Republic) said a peaceful world could only be achieved when subjects like those being considered by the Assembly dominated debates among neighbours, countries, Governments and the governed. A world of conflict had been founded in the abandonment of "a culture of dialogue". Although dialogue was not the imposition of certain beliefs, points of view or culture on others, groups regularly took up dialogue as a strategy for domination and as a means of imposition on their interlocutors. Dialogue strengthened cooperation, tolerance and mutual respect, and provided a means of examining differences, sharing ideas, breaking down mistrust and promoting togetherness. Dialogue should, therefore, be promoted as a solution to the problems of an interconnected world. Continuing, he said promoting dialogue implied the rejection of theories that encouraged the clash of civilizations, cultures and religions, as well as of international terrorism. Its promotion also implied fighting for the respect of human dignity and rights. By working toward a culture of peace, Member States would commit themselves to the peaceful resolution of conflict. Conflicts, like natural disasters, led to death, depleted resources, paralyzed economies and nations immersed in insecurity and despair. Conflicts aggravated political, economic, social and environmental situations, which caused suffering and unimaginable hardship. "Only through dialogue, which will bring us closer and help us understand others' arguments, could we think of living in peace," he said. He said it did not matter if religions practiced their faiths differently or used different Holy Books, "because we were all members of one family and human race". Although religious fundamentalists acted under the notion that only they possessed a monopoly on transcendent truths of spirit, religion was, in fact, intrinsically against discrimination, violence, hate, hostility and conflict. In that regard, he trusted that the Assembly's discussions on Dialogue would be as fruitful as the expectations of its promoters, and would lead to an era of understanding, cooperation, compassion and peace. However, such an imagined world

would not be one of stillness, “in which we would find ourselves in a permanent state of contemplation; human beings, as history had shown, were always fighting”. That being the case, he said that if there was to be peace, let it be an “active peace”.

CARINA CHRISTENSEN, Minister of Culture of Denmark, said that increasing intercultural dialogue and understanding was an integral and indispensable part of the effort to ensure a dynamic and peaceful development of international relations, and it was due to the appreciation of that fact that her Government had been supportive of several interfaith initiatives in the country, as well as abroad. To that end, Denmark attached great importance to promoting dialogue between young people, and, in today’s ever-changing world, it was vital to consider carefully what was conveyed to future generations. In that regard, education was perhaps the single most efficient path to a peaceful handling of cultural and religious diversity, she stressed. Such education had to put a stronger emphasis on commonly shared values like tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, protection and promotion of universal human rights, including the rights of religious minorities, adherence to non-violence, and the principles of peaceful co-existence.

For that reason, she continued, Denmark was proud to have hosted the Copenhagen conference on education for dialogue and intercultural understanding in October this year. That conference had been organized and sponsored by what he said was an impressive group of international and national organizations committed to the objective. Among them were the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization; the Council of Europe; the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures; the Danish Centre for Culture and Development; and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Noting that one of the main themes of the Copenhagen conference was how to combat stereotypes about religions and beliefs in educational systems, she expressed the hope that the resultant expert recommendations would serve as an inspiration for practitioners throughout the world just as she hoped today’s Assembly meeting would similarly do. She added that it was important that, as responsible leaders, participants in the Assembly meeting promulgated tolerance and mutual understanding to avoid conflict and hatred between peoples just because they had different cultures, different beliefs and looked different.

KERRY O'BRIEN, Senator of Australia, said his country was committed to the proactive pursuit of peace and understanding, and attached great importance to interfaith cooperation as a means of promoting mutual respect and tolerance across the region. Today was an historic day for the United Nations, with leaders of different faiths gathering to discuss ways to use those beliefs to create a better world. The challenge now was to transform that initiative into real outcomes that affected peoples' lives.

Warmly welcoming the Philippines' leadership in promoting the Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, he said Australia had been accepted as a member of the Dialogue, and he also commended the roles of Saudi Arabia and Spain in promoting the World Interfaith Dialogue in Madrid, in July. His Government actively supported the Parliament of the World's Religions, and was committed to the work of the Alliance of Civilizations, having joined its Group of Friends in 2007. With the European Union, Australia co-hosted a Youth Interfaith Forum in December 2007, which had recognized the important role of young people in fostering peace. At a regional level, Australia had taken the lead in fostering interfaith cooperation through the Regional Interfaith Dialogue, which aimed to focus the attention of religious leaders on their potential to enhance moderate voices within their communities. Indeed, he said the Southeast Asian region's religious leaders were uniquely placed to build trust, but by the same token, it was the duty of all in the community -- including political decision makers -- to apply a values-based dialogue to all their activities.

GIADALLA A. ETTALHI (Libya) stressed the pressing need to intensify dialogue between religions and cultures, which would in turn serve as a tool in realizing the goals of the United Nations, as stipulated in its Charter and reaffirmed by the outcome document of the Assembly's 2005 World Summit. He commended the "great efforts" of the United Nations, particularly those of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, several regional organizations, and especially the "Alliance of Civilizations" formed by Turkey and Spain. He highlighted Islam and Muslims in general as the "principle victim" -- though not the only one -- of events and responses after 11 September, 2001. Though not the first time Islam had been targeted by misunderstanding or prejudice, the intensification of "Islamophobia" had occurred in recent years, according to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. That had resulted in the defamation of Islam and racial intolerance of Muslims in Western societies. Muslims were particularly concerned because, while the overwhelming majority of their religious brethren adhered to the principles of peace and tolerance, a vested group of Islamaphobes was spreading negative portrayals of both the religion and its followers as supportive of terrorism and extremism. He also stated that the reasons for tension and conflict arose from "the spirit of domination" and in trying to make other civilizations and cultures "carbon copies" of themselves. In conclusion, he noted Libya's hosting of many meetings for dialogue between religions, and its belief in the importance of gaining an

understanding of other religions which will create a world where “peace, progress and justice prevail”.

GERT ROSENTHAL (Guatemala), paying tribute to the King of Saudi Arabia for initiating today’s important meeting, said Guatemala understood first-hand the tragic consequences of intolerance, whether arising from ethnic, religious, social or ideological differences. Among the underpinnings of the peace accords that had ended almost four decades of fratricidal conflict was the formation of a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual society. Continuing, he said a culture for peace was a tool to be massively disseminated. That required strengthening education, which was the first action that should be promoted among the eight identified in the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. Eliminating content that incited hate from school textbooks was the starting point. Closely linked to that was the need to update education and cultural policies to reflect a human-rights based approach, which guaranteed equality among men and women. In the sphere of education, he reaffirmed the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s lead role in applying a programme of peace. The adoption of UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was a clear example of the categorical rejection of a thesis that predicted an inevitable clash between civilizations, while the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples had been a recognition of the inherent value of human diversity. Guatemala supported the Alliance of Civilizations, and activities of the Tripartite Forum on the Cooperation between Religions in favour of Peace and Development, among other initiatives that rejected the misuse of religions by extremists. In closing, he stressed that Cultural Diversity Day, on 21 May, and International Peace Day, on 21 September, be better acknowledged.

PETER MAURER (Switzerland) said dialogue was about creating relationships with people who thought differently from one another. Today’s meeting of ideas and thought was what drove transformation. It changed the way one person or State saw another. It changed political dynamics. He went on to say that an important component of dialogue was that of not just giving but receiving. Each participant, rather than believing they were the high point of society or the sole purveyor of truth, needed to have the humility to receive. Without that ability, a person would not be capable of dialogue.

With a long history of co-existence and pacifism, Switzerland had learned to develop a common determination, focusing on what united in practice and not what separated ideologically. In doing so, it had developed a pragmatic political culture, where the protection of minorities and a constant search for compromise was crucial for the unity in their country. That responsibility initiated from each citizen and from each State. “It begins with us”, he said, and quoted the opening remarks of the President of the General Assembly. “We are gathered here today to talk not about religion. We are here today to pledge to place our reserves of moral strength at the service of the goals of the

United Nations.” The job of ensuring respect for the diverse cultures of the global community was not just political will. It was the smooth functioning of the rule of law, where freedom of thought, conviction, religion and freedom from discrimination could be guaranteed. Switzerland supported the interfaith Dialogue on the Culture of Peace and the processes that would lead to the transformations of conflicts. “We interact in unity despite our differences, to make our world a better world.” That was the core of Switzerland’s of foreign policy and one which they pursued within the Organization.

Mr. HENNINGSSON, Senior Advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, welcomed today’s noble initiative undertaken by the King of Saudi Arabia. Discussing cooperation between the United Nations and religious organizations, he drew attention to the dialogue that took place in Istanbul, Turkey, last month, and included the Director for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Turning to the UNESCO project “The Image of the Other” in school curricula, he said that project had been ongoing for four years, carried out in cooperation with the League of Arab States, among other partners. In closing, he profoundly appreciated the United Nations’ efforts to restore trust among the world’s peoples, notably through initiatives stemming from the Muslim world.

FRANK MAJOOR (Netherlands), aligning himself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union, recalled that the European Union had been built on a culture of peace established after years of war. Building on the three needed characteristics for fruitful religious dialogue, just discussed by former French Prime Minister Alain Juppé, he observed that people had multiple identities: those who were Christian, were also men and women; those who were Hindu, were also artists and journalists. In other words, interreligious dialogue was only one form of dialogue. Dialogue also should be welcomed on basis of economic social and political identities.

Second, the Netherlands had facilitated interreligious dialogue on various occasions, he explained, pointing out that dialogue that went hand-in-hand with various forms of cooperation was very often effective. Through it, people discovered their commonalities, and found that religions shared differences that supported human rights and fundamental freedoms. On that basis, he urged bridging gaps. In the same spirit, he supported the Faith in Human Rights initiative, organized by a Dutch non-governmental organization, to be held at The Hague on 10 December. Third, he said Governments were facing huge financial, environmental and social challenges that needed the help of business, youth and others to solve them. The Dutch legal system dealt nationally and

internationally with the rights and freedoms of individuals. It would not be possible to point to the authoritative voice on behalf of religion. It would be impossible for a judge to determine if the rights of religion had been violated -- to whom would he turn for guidance? The Netherlands did not support calls for legal protection from religious beliefs, but rather supported the rights of individual believers.

For the same reasons, he was sceptical about establishing an advisory body that represented the world's religious movements. How would it work, he wondered, and how would it decide who would represent any particular movement? How would belief be defined in such a context? He feared that such a body would produce more problems than it would be able to solve. As such, he urged making interreligious dialogue practical, and welcomed initiatives taken in the past year in the hope that they would prove practical and durable. His country would continue to help foster such a dialogue.

Conclusion

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that the conference, initiated by Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz comes at a time when the need for dialogue among peoples has never been greater. "It has brought together people who might not otherwise have a chance to interact," said Ban Ki-moon. "Along with other initiatives, it will contribute to building a more harmonious world."

Among those it brought together were the Saudi king and Israeli President Shimon Peres, who although they did not directly speak with one another, did for the first time, have dinner in the same room.

Human rights groups and others have criticized the Saudis for sponsoring a conference at the United Nations urging tolerance when it discriminates at home. When asked whether his country would now become more tolerant of other faiths, the foreign minister was cautious in his reply.

"If you bring people together so that they understand that they have the same ethics, they have the same values, this will open the hearts and minds of people for further progress," said Prince Saud al-Faisal. "But to say from the beginning, you have to transform yourself into something which you are not now or nothing else can be achieved, is, I think carrying the argument too far."

List of Participants and Summary of their Views

1. Britain
2. Philippine....Welcomes the initiative and would continue to work for such trend in order to solution its own domestic problem
3. Pakistan
4. Lebanon....No solid resolution can be arrived not until Israel returns Arabs' land
5. Saudi Arabia.....All religions are one sharing same value and ethics

6. Israel.... Hope that all Arab countries will follow the path of the Saudi for peace
7. Bahrain
8. Spain
9. Holy See.....All faith should see themselves as brothers
10. Palestine... Seeking for peace in the region through dialogue... tolerance and coexistence among religions could only be promoted if dialogue aimed at achieving peace was deepened and Israel should rest UN resolution
11. Afghanistan.....the reconstruction process is an indication that Afghanistan is the melting pot of all civilization.
12. Finland.....Israeli-Palestine conflict has always been the issue dividing the west and Muslim world...and for peace to reign, both Israel and Palestine must consider dialogue and compromise
13. Qatar
14. Djibouti Moral integrity of speech and action, tolerance, and the quest for virtue and wisdom were universal values, he said, urging concentrating on a belief in those noble principles that were the foundation of all religions.
15. France (EU)..... Such dialogue should be as broad as possible, and compliance with the values outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a “vital pillar” on which to build it
16. India
17. Dominican....we are all members of the human races that brotherhood should bring us together than allowing religious fragmentation
18. Sweden..... The Image of the Other” in school curricula should be refined
19. Macedonia.....Supports civilizational dialogue
20. Denmark.... Eliminating stereotypes about religions and beliefs in educational systems can help bring about harmonious co-existence
21. Kazakhstan.....Nothing is as vital as mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among all.
22. Australia.....is playing its part regional to foster religious understanding
23. Kuwait
24. Jordan.....Justice, respect for international law, and the right of all peoples to live in dignity were deep, shared values that could possibly bring a peaceful end, along with improved communication and the support of youth
25. Egypt.....differences in beliefs did not preclude cooperation, mutual understanding, friendliness or an exchange of benefits sanctioned by God. There were two common cornerstones revealed to the messengers of God: to worship God alone with devotion, and to maintain good manners
26. Libya.... At the current critical stage, an objective and “true understanding” of each other was imperative, as unsettled elements in the past were being revisited and were resulting in modern-day political actions that caused wars, destruction and severe suffering to millions around the world.
27. Guatemala...The world should develop a culture for peace and should be massively disseminated
28. Switzerland.... Switzerland supported the interfaith Dialogue on the Culture of Peace and the processes that would lead to the transformations of conflicts. “We interact in unity despite our differences, to make our world a better world.”

29. Netherlands.....One of the problem of the world religions is their multiplicity and diverse interpretations, hence interreligious dialogue should be made practical, and welcomed initiatives taken in the past year in the hope that they would prove practical and durable
30. Morocco.....globalization can solve the problem and technology
31. India.....Dialogue along religions and civilization has long been practiced in India

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: November 26, 2008

South, Central America and the Caribbean

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From November 16th -22nd, 2008

Governance Issue

Many governments in the region believe the next era should spotlight the importance of the region to the rest of the world. This view is floated as many of the countries are adopting democracy and making authoritarianism a tale of the past. Many might contest the status of Latin America democracy on many grounds because of certain illiberal practices. Secondly the presence of natural resources in the region and its uncontested Amazon resources is believed to be one of those reasons why the world should pay them attention. The region is relatively rich in oil as the Middle East and most countries endowed with the black-gold have been reaping the profit of oil-hike in the international market. South America has become increasingly important, given the need for sharing energy supplies and preserving the environment.

Of course the European Union has continue to made way for economic relations with the region in view of democratization of the region and bringing it forth to the international economy. The geo-economic and strategic status of the region has been further made clear upon its newly founded Union of South American Nations (Unasur) is aimed at boosting economic integration and political cohesion within the region and beyond. Brazil's President Lula da Silva said the move showed that South America was becoming a global player.

From the above the impression created is that Latin America is on the verge of socio-political and economic development. But there have been numerous analyses dissecting and trying to understand if Latin America socio-political and economic development as a reality development doomed to failure.

The argument is that the past of the region was defined by civil strife, guerilla war disturbances, economic instability and military coup. Now it is transiting towards democracy but still haunted by its past, as such democratic principles are yet to be fully manifested owing to conflicting interest and stakeholders manipulating the politics of the region. There was great expectation from the region with the hope of matching up with the Asian Tigers' development instead the economic has been waylaid by compelling forces. Since many believe in democracy as the hallmark of good governance but with the dearth of things in Latin American countries the people became wary of democracy

and would rather entertain any form of government that would ameliorate their plights. As democracy fails in Latin America as a result of the way it is being practiced, populist and authoritarian government had inroad into different countries of the region with the intention of turning things around. Nevertheless the fulfillment of such promises hangs in the air.

Analysts believe that the region has the potential of joining the wagon of economic great region if truly the governments would seriously practice the free-market economy championed by Washington. Similarly political instability can cease to exist if serious democratic precepts are allowed to manifest and social inequality that has long characterized the region be eradicated.

Transfer of power is another angle related to the issue of governance in the region. With the kind of democracy practiced all of the efforts of the opposition to unseat the incumbent are usually abortive. The latter would always create hurdles that would prevent oppositions challenging their position and even would resist international pressure. Hence the situation is always a turnover for the incumbent as such remaining in power through electoral fraud and manipulation of events prior and after election.

But the power of the incumbent is not often permanent, challenged by the leadership of the opposition when there is economic problem in the country. This often gives opportunity to the opposition to mobilize the people against the government regardless of the government apparatus to stop the advancement of the opposition. Sometimes when the incumbent moves towards autocracy, members among the ruling elite can also pose challenge as seen in the Venezuela politics. For instance in Venezuela opponents of President Hugo Chavez demanded for the return of an opposition-sided television station that was booted off public airwaves. Many are still upset by Chavez's decision not to renew the broadcast license of Radio Caracas Television, or RCTV, which had been critical of his government. Chavez replaced the network with a state-run channel that regularly transmits pro-government propaganda. RCTV now only airs on cable. Several thousand people marched through Venezuela's shouting anti-Chavez slogans and demanding that RCTV's broadcast license be returned. Chavez had repeatedly accused RCTV of violating broadcasting laws and inciting a failed coup in 2002. RCTV executives have denied any wrongdoing. This is an indication that both the opposition and civil society can make life unbearable for the power that be.

Furthermore authoritarian system becomes competitive authoritarian when there is much of international and global pressure. The fact that the world is interdependent and no country can live in isolation makes the government dance to the tune of the global community for democratization.

However, certain realities still exist in the region as Latin America nevertheless has relatively recorded success which should not be downplayed. The region has garnered more international attention and continued to play a significant role in championing troubling issues such as climate change, energy crisis and economic inequality between the global north and south. It has also recorded a fairly good economy in spite of many hurdles, although the region remains under the tutelage of socialist leaders questioning the meddling tactics of Washington in the region.

Latin America in the recent times has become more fraternized owing to the different form of cooperation ensuing among the states, and most particularly (the formation of the Union of South American Nations, Unasur) a prototype of the EU created recently and spearheaded by the Brazilian government. Similarly it has welcomed more of democratic government although it might not match the liberal democracy of the west yet it takes the shape of competitive authoritarian democracy identified by some analysts. The region particularly South America has seen more of indigenous political and economic participation owing to the socialist policies of the governments.

Regional Cooperation

Brazil's President Lula da Silva said during inaugurating the South American Nations (Unasur) that the achievement and cooperation within the region shows that South America was becoming a global player. Brazil also wants Unasur to co-ordinate defence affairs across South America. Hugo Chavez of Venezuela sees it as counterweight to US ('Number one enemy') hegemonic stretch in the entire region. However Borja the union's secretary-general said that some leaders had balked at his vision of putting regional trade blocs within Unasur's remit. The leaders of the region were also split over plans for a South American defence council that would resolve conflicts, promote military co-operation and possibly coordinate joint weapons production.

The union is hoped to bring a dramatic change, as Lula observed that "A united South America is going to change positions in the chessboard of global power, not to the benefit of one or the other, but to the benefit of all." According to Lula, Unasur should now forge ahead with innovative projects in areas of priority such as, for instance, financial and energetic integration, improvement of regional infrastructure, and of highway and railway connections. The president also cited cooperation in social and educational areas. In an attempt to deprive the world from shouldering any unnecessary blame on the region or disputing its achievement. The Brazilian leader said "The fact that some regard our continent as unstable is a sign of political life, there is no democracy without the people on the streets, without confronting different ideas and proposals."

Aside from the regional cooperation, other members of the region are reaching out to countries welcoming their policies. Venezuela has been closer to the Russian; Brazil has been close with the Middle East, while Colombia associates with Washington. Colombia has been urging the United States to sign the proposed Colombian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) that would pave way for both countries to trade with ease. The agreement has been challenged by the democrats in the Congress and there is likelihood that President-elect Obama might not agree with it owing to his statement. Obama was reported to have declared: "I'll also oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement if President Bush insists on sending it to Congress because the violence against unions in Colombia would make a mockery of the very labor protections that we have insisted be included in these kinds of agreements." Colombia president although rejected Obama's position: "I deplore the fact that Sen. Obama, aspiring to be president of the United States, should be unaware of Colombia's efforts. I think it is for political calculations that he is making a statement that does not correspond to Colombia's reality." Meanwhile Colombia leaders want the United States appraise Colombia's achievement on anti-narcotic and terrorism in a matter of few years.

In the same way, Mexican government continues to the struggle against narcotic upon the view that 40% of drugs manufacture in that country gets into the United States. Hence the US House approved anti-drug aid to Mexico and Central America to continue the fight against this social proscribe act. As part of an emergency appropriations bill, the Senate on May 22, 2008 approved \$350 million in drug war aid to Mexico, with an additional \$100 million for Central America, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Reducing the Bush administration's request for \$500 million to Mexico and \$50 million to Central America, the Senate also adopted language that would hold up a quarter of the funds until the State Department rules that Mexico is meeting human rights markers. The House approved \$400 million for Mexico, with similar provisions. Differences need to be worked out in a joint conference. "Human rights abuses in the army are routinely investigated by the military itself, and that leads to impunity," said Tamara Taraciuk of Human Rights Watch. "The big issue is accountability."

Regional Tussle: Between Socialist governments versus Pro-American government

The rise of socialist governments in the region has further reiterated the fear of the United States nurtured during the 1980s. The region although is departing away from authoritarian system moving closer to democracy though many analysts still assert that it is in the transitional stage. In spite the democratic practices of the region, many of the government are resentful of United States hegemony in the region and continue chanting the slogan that they want the region to be empire-free. Meanwhile such scenario should not paint the scene that the region is totally replete with anti-American government, in fact there are those that still believe in the United States and would continue to open relation with Washington. Colombia, Argentina, Peru and few others are those that still

give the United States some amount of reception, even Brazil having the largest economy does not welcome USA hegemony, yet continue to play a midway game with Washington.

In spite of the hatred for much of USA meddling in their domestic affairs, among the poor countries in the region struggle with the view that Washington has deserted its humanitarian aid towards the region in lieu of its war on terrorism. It is worth mentioning that the connection between drug, weapon, unrest, and militancy remains a contentious threat to the USA, hence making the United States to assist those countries in the region ready to fight its threat on its behalf. It is this connection that the strife between pro-America and populist government continues to exacerbate in the region.

Colombia before the recent times has long been in tussle with the FARC revolutionary group believed to be fomenting disturbance for the state. Colombia of course remained an ally of the United States in combating such a menace. Before President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia rendered worthless the strength of FARC, there erupted a border infiltration problem between Colombia and Ecuador. The latter accused Colombia of transgressing and violating its territorial sovereignty while Colombia accused Ecuador of giving sanctuary to the militant FARC group. The incident triggered the dissatisfaction of other neighbours like Venezuela accusing Colombia of representing the bellicose nature of the United States in the region. It was quite glaring that countries in the region condemned the infiltration. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa insisted for an apology from Colombia for a military attack against his territory, as well as his "formal and firm commitment" that Colombia will never "violate" the sovereignty of another country. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua also broke off relations with Colombia over the attack inside Ecuador.

The border issue aggravated its scope and turned into a localized economic woe. The crisis became more of Colombian-Venezuelan as trade relations were severed between the two countries. It was during the Rio Summit that Dominican President mediated the crisis. Before the mediation Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who was angry about the cross-border raid, stopped the importation of food from Colombia, even though Venezuela's food industry relied on Colombia and more importantly Venezuela is Colombia's second-largest trading partner after the U.S. Chavez was reported to have said, "We can't depend on them, not even for a grain of rice."

The border between Colombia and Venezuela is one of South America's most porous borders. Tens of thousands of Colombians and Venezuelans live or work on either side. Colombia's treasury minister, Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, said Thursday that a complete shutdown of trade with Venezuela could cost his country 100,000 jobs. Trade between

the nations totaled \$5.7 billion from January through November 2007, according to Colombian government statistics. Venezuela imported \$4.4 billion in goods from its neighbor, nearly doubling from 2006 because of high demand for Colombian-made vehicles, car parts and clothing. Colombia, meanwhile, purchased only \$1.2 billion worth of Venezuelan goods, mostly petrochemical products and plastic goods. "If they shut off trade, Colombia has more to lose," said Bertrand Delgado, an analyst in the New York office of the IDEAglobal consulting firm. "It's easier to find someone to sell you food than to look for new markets to sell to."

In the same fashion it was quite astonishing that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez appears to be the only president to back Russia's recognition of two breakaway regions of Georgia, although Venezuela backing seconded Belarus as countries that support Moscow's stance. Chavez said during a televised speech from an oil field along the Orinoco Oil Belt. Chavez, a fierce critic of the US who has strengthened ties with Moscow in recent years, says Washington is using its ally Georgia to weaken a resurgent Russia. Chavez has bought billions of dollars of weapons from Russia and supports its increased role on the world stage as a counter-balance to the US.

Environmental Issue

Natural force and its disastrous consequence belie the effectiveness of modern scientific technology. Stopping the forces of nature from causing havoc is no doubt serious concern for governments across the natural disastrous prone regions. The tropical storm that stroke the Caribbean, Central America and crossing towards North America in the recent times attest to this fact. The storm has wrecked some damage in Jamaica and Cuba and many parts of the Caribbean and Central America. Many officers and the locals thought such is a repetition of Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans in the USA.

Disaster like earthquake and tropical storm became source of integration among the countries in the region particularly in the Caribbean and Central America. When various form of hurricanes and earth eruption stroke the region it became a serious challenge for the governments and a sort of concert and mutual response was put forward combating the natural threat.

In Argentina, local groups filed an international complaint against Shell calling for immediate action by the company to redress the social and environmental harms caused by the refinery to the community and to the local environment during decades of abuse and irresponsible corporate behavior. INPADE (a local NGO) and Friend of the Earth Argentina, representing the residents of Villa Inflamable, presented parallel complaints (called Specific Instances) to the Governments of Argentina and the Netherlands, today, against SHELL CAPSA (the Argentine affiliate of Royal Dutch Shell). The complaint

denounces Shell for a long list of national, provincial, municipal and international law violations that are not only claimed by the community against the company, but that have been confirmed in a recent audit and preventive closure ordered by the National Environmental Authority of Argentina (the SAyDS).

Similarly in Peru more than 5,000 indigenous and peasant communities in Peru launched a petition drive aimed at getting President Alan García's decree promoting private investment in communally owned land declared unconstitutional. Legislative decree 1,015, approved by García on May 20, 2008 makes it possible for indigenous communities in the country's highland and jungle regions to authorise the sale or lease of communal land to private investors with the votes of just 50 percent plus one of the members of the community assemblies. The new law modifies legislation on private investment that required the consent of two-thirds of the qualified members of the village assembly to sell or lease land. Now the votes of only a simple majority in village assemblies, who no longer must be duly qualified members, are needed.

The constitutionality challenge is based on the argument that the executive branch approved the decree by making use of special legislative powers granted it by Congress for another purpose signing a free trade agreement with the United States and that it was unable to get the legislature to pass the new law several weeks earlier. Gloria Ramos, the chair of the legislative committee on Andean, Amazon and Afro-Peruvian Peoples, the Environment and Ecology, said the committee had rejected the initiative on the grounds that it undermined the rights of local communities. "The executive branch has sidestepped the legislature to do what it wants, which is why we will demand that the law be overturned," said Ramos, who belongs to the centre-left Union for Peru (UPP) party. Several other interest groups have stood up against the move of the government and as a support for the Indigenous people.

Furthermore, the Guyana's president, Bharrat Jagdeo has become one of the world leaders geared at protecting the climate. His campaign to protect the world's rain forests is expressed in saving Guyana's huge rain forest from chainsaws and prevents the release of billions of tons of carbon dioxide, the main global-warming gas. The rain forests form a cooling band around Earth's equator. And their accelerating loss - from logging, farming, mining and burning is a major cause of climate change, accounting for one-fifth of all carbon-dioxide emissions. That is more than the amount the United States puts into the atmosphere from all sources and more than the emissions generated by all of the world's cars, trucks, buses and airplanes. In same vein the Brazilian leader said Amazon belongs to the region and pillaging of the natural resources by outsiders will not be welcomed.

In Panama due to community development King Tito Santana, one of the last tribal kings in the Americas was driven into exile from his lands deep in the Panamanian jungle by a fight over a hydroelectric project that has divided his tiny kingdom. "Many of us are opposed to a king who, for us, is selling our society without any thought for tomorrow," said Eduardo Santana, a nephew of Tito. In 2004, Tito agreed to let Panama's government and Colombian firm Empresas Publicas de Medellin, or EPM, build a \$50 million plant to

harness the power of the River Bonyic, which flows by the Naso's wood and palm-thatch huts built on stilts. The tribe's general assembly accused Tito of putting his own interests first. It drove him into exile and installed his uncle, Valentin Santana, as the new king. However exiled king Tito wants a referendum to restal him back to power, a position still recognized by the Panamanian government.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: December 3, 2008

South, Central America and the Caribbean

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From November 23rd -29th, 2008

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Latin Diplomacy

The fear of McCain winning the US election will hurt the region the most and might be the continuity of Bush policy in the region pushed many in the region to show

interest for the victory of Obama. Although the election has come and gone, yet according to the preliminary data from Latinobarómetro poll before the US election, taken in 18 countries, show that 29% of respondents think an Obama victory would be better for their country, against only 8% favouring Mr McCain. Perhaps surprisingly, 30% say that it makes no difference who wins, while 31% claim ignorance. Enthusiasm for Mr Obama is particularly high in the Dominican Republic (52%), Costa Rica, Uruguay and Brazil (41%). In Brazil, six candidates in this month's municipal elections changed their names to include "Barrack Obama" in them. The poll suggests that support for Mr Obama is greater among better-educated Latin Americans. Marta Lagos, Latinobarómetro's director, says the relatively widespread indifference shows the extent to which the United States has lost influence in the region in recent years.

The general consensus has been against the United States' foreign-policy concerns in Latin America in view of trade, migration, illegal drugs and Cuba. In the view of many Obama's government will represent a change in direction and more or less US interventionist policy in the region. It would be harder for the socialist leaning governments like Chávez to portray Mr Obama as "the devil", as he did Mr Bush. Perhaps some of the position of Obama might go down well with many of the region's left of centre governments.

Jorge G. Castañeda a global distinguished professor at New York University and was Foreign Minister of Mexico from 2000 to 2003. He is the author, most recently, of *Ex-Mex* and the co-editor, with Marco Morales, of *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left*. Castañeda also reiterated the view that the key to a successful foreign policy in Latin America will be focusing on four critical issues such as Cuba, immigration, trade, and the "two lefts".

Latin American diplomatic direction proves the point that the region is drawing the world closer to it and further reinstating the importance of the region to the development of both global economy and politics.

Russia presence in the region has been multidimensional; it has been signing oil deal and military alliance with countries particularly the leftist governments. While the recent Russian display in the Caribbean tries to balance US engagement in the Eastern Europe. Iran has equally been playing a great role in the region with lot of bilateral cooperation. In the same way, Europe as well as US have not receded their ties in the region. China is also making headway particularly in the oil and mining sectors. The involvement of all of these foreign players creates a tussling climate among the regional powers like Brazil and Venezuela trying to woo the foreign actors to their side. All Latin American countries are naturally keen to diversify their economic relations, and some seek wider political ties

Democratization and Political Issues

Five years of strong economic growth have prompted a slow but fairly steady rise in support for democracy and its institutions among Latin Americans, although many remain frustrated by the way their political systems work in practice. Most see themselves as politically moderate, but they retain a yearning for strong leaders and expect the state to solve their problems. Most respondents also see democracy and market based economy as the messiah that can redeem the region of its lot. Various public institutions were also surveyed while the church remained the most trusted institution across the region. These are some of the findings from the latest Latinobarómetro poll taken in 18 countries across the region.

A reviving faith in the ballot box 1

Which of the following statements do you agree with most? %

	Democracy is preferable to any other type of government					In certain circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one				
	1996	2001	2007	2008	Change since 2007	1996	2001	2007	2008	Change since 2007
Paraguay	59	35	33	53	20	26	43	36	29	-7
Venezuela	62	57	67	82	15	19	20	14	9	-5
Colombia	60	36	47	62	15	20	16	12	8	-4
El Salvador	56	25	38	50	12	12	10	20	27	7
Dominican Rep.	na	na	64	73	9	na	na	21	15	-6
Honduras	42	57	38	44	6	14	8	17	15	-2
Chile	54	45	46	51	5	19	19	21	14	-7
Uruguay	80	79	75	79	4	9	10	10	6	-4
Brazil	50	30	43	47	4	24	18	17	19	2
Guatemala	50	33	32	34	2	21	21	33	27	-6
Bolivia	64	54	67	68	1	17	17	14	10	-4
Peru	63	62	47	45	-2	13	12	22	20	-2
Argentina	71	58	63	60	-3	15	21	20	19	-1
Nicaragua	59	43	61	58	-3	14	22	10	8	-2
Mexico	53	46	48	43	-5	23	35	14	15	1
Panama	75	34	62	56	-6	10	23	13	15	2
Ecuador	52	40	65	56	-9	18	24	13	16	3
Costa Rica	80	71	83	67	-16	7	8	5	14	9

Source: Latinobarómetro

The recent electoral climate in Nicaragua which some claim was punctuated with irregularities accounts for the reason why democracy in the region is said to be illiberal. The opposition accuses the government of democratic harassment and barring them from doing their political rights. Their complaints were echoed by Nicaragua's Catholic bishops. "People feel defrauded," said Leopoldo Brenes, Managua's archbishop. The

OAS expressed “concern” while the United States’ government cast doubt on whether the election was free and fair. Opposition supporters clashed with Sandinistas, each side throwing stones at the other. Eduardo Montealegre a former banker with an MBA from Harvard University, was the runner-up to Mr Ortega in the 2006 presidential election, which was watched by observers from the Organisation of American States (OAS), the European Union and the Carter Center. Upon the recent election Mr Montealegre swiftly conceded defeat. He wants a recount supervised by international observers. But European governments are increasingly fed up with the president’s authoritarianism, and are preparing to cut their economic aid (which accounts for a third of the government’s budget). There is fear with such democratic ill-practice in Nicaragua, election coming up in friendly Venezuela might follow suit, as Chavez is accused of waylaying oppositions.

Prediction that Chavez might also undermine opposition parties from challenging the incumbents does not sound true, as opposition in Venezuela recent regional election became victors. The election result indicated that Chavez super-monopoly is losing essence, while the economic problem facing the country is also affecting the popularity of the president. Although Chavez remains the most popular politician in the country yet urban dwellers are very much worried by the rampant crime, inflation and poor administration that are starting to eclipse generous oil-financed social programmes as the hallmarks of Mr Chávez’s rule. The opposition won in areas that matters in terms of population and it is now left for the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) to contain the country’s crisis in order to withstand the pressure emanating from dissidents and opposition parties.

Francisco Rodriguez Assistant Professor of Economics and Latin American Studies at Wesleyan University and was Chief Economist of the Venezuelan National Assembly from 2000 to 2004 made critical observation of Venezuela socio-political and economic situation. Rodriguez observed that even critics of Hugo Chávez tend to concede that he has made helping the poor his top priority. But in fact, Chávez’s government has not done any more to fight poverty than past Venezuelan governments, and his much-heralded social programs have had little effect. A close look at the evidence reveals just how much Chávez’s “revolution” has hurt Venezuela’s economy and that the poor are hurting most of all.

In recent municipal elections held in Chile, Alliance, the centre-right opposition, won 41% of the vote for mayors, two percentage points more than the Concertación but enough to win eight of the 14 regional capitals. It was the first-ever defeat in a nationwide election for the Concertación, which has ruled Chile ever since the end of General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in 1990.

Alliance appears to be pro-US challenging the incumbency of the ruling government that has maintained power still the end of General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in 1990. The victory of the Alliance parties in the local election could point

to the fact that the socialist government would have to struggle to maintain its hegemony come December national election. Although the Concertación Socialist and Christian Democrat parties, won 45% of the total vote to 36% for the Alliance. But more people (some 10% more) voted for mayors than for councillors. The overall result confirmed opinion polls that make Sebastián Piñera, a wealthy businessman and the Alliance's putative candidate, the front-runner for the presidency. The relatively victory of Alliance party in the local election showed the discontentment of the people for the ruling government. It appears that people are tired, though Chile economy is relatively buoyant than other economies in the region, yet the corruption, ineffectiveness and lack of youth integration in the government makes matter worst. Yet if voters are tiring of the Concertación, opinion polls suggest they are not thrilled by the Alliance. By and large, the scenario in Chile supports the view that opposition and bad economy continues to play strong role in Latin American illiberal democracy.

The expulsion of American ambassador, Philip Goldberg from Bolivia by the Bolivia's socialist president, Evo Morales is an indication of the face-off between the socialist government and Washington. Morales shut down the USAID office in charge of anti-drug efforts for the past 25 years. Protecting the coca farmer and the indigenous source livelihood was the platform that brought Morales to power coupled with his far-left position of ending dependence on the American "empire", the IMF, the World Bank and the like.

In spite the hatred for the United States, Morales knows that at least 30,000 jobs in Bolivia depend on duty-free exports to the United States. Many of them are in the textile factories and workshops of El Alto, a satellite city of La Paz and one of his political strongholds. George Bush's administration responded to Mr. Goldberg's expulsion by declaring Bolivia unco-operative on drugs. It also plans to suspend tariff preferences for Bolivia's imports. The government points out that it is wiping out more than 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) of coca this year (though the UN reckons Bolivia's cocaine output rose 11% in 2007). It says that Venezuela and other new allies will take the goods Bolivia was exporting to the United States. That looks unlikely. Mr. Morales, the first Andean Indian to be elected president in Bolivia, is popular; he won a recall referendum in August with 67% of the vote. But plunging commodity prices will hit the economy. Bolivia can ill afford to lose the American market for its manufactures. Bolivia continues to play a pragmatic game of saving its sovereignty and not totally spitting on the face of Washington sake for its economy.

Honduras recent deal with the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA in Spanish), the anti-American alliance led by Venezuela's Hugo Chávez is an indication that socialist and anti-American tendency continues to spread tentacles in the region. Honduras undoubtedly has always been an ally of the United States, a small Central American country used by the CIA to effect regime change in Guatemala in the 1950s and Nicaragua in the 1980s. The president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya's motives seems clear enough. After growing at 6% for several years, the economy has slowed this year because of the problems in the United States, its main export market and source of both

tourists and remittances. The trade deficit has widened and food and fuel price rises have pushed up inflation.

The country accuses Washington of negligence and not according serious attention; although Honduras was the first country in the Americas to sign an agreement for additional aid from the Millennium Challenge Account, a foreign-aid scheme set up by Mr Bush. Under this programme, the United States agreed to spend \$215m in Honduras over five years, improving roads and helping farmers. But continued disbursement of this money has been thrown into doubt because American officials have adjudged Honduras to have made insufficient effort to eliminate corruption. Mr Chávez attaches no such conditions to his largesse.

Earlier this year Honduras joined Petrocaribe, a broader programme in which Venezuela subsidises oil shipments to 18 countries around the Caribbean basin. Now, in return for joining ALBA, Venezuela has offered to buy Honduran bonds worth \$100m, whose proceeds will be spent on housing for the poor. Mr Chávez has also offered a \$30m credit line for farming, 100 tractors, and 4m low-energy light bulbs (Cuba will send technicians to help to install them, as well as more doctors and literacy teachers.) Under a vaguer clause in the pact, Honduras is ceding the right to look for oil to an ALBA-run company.

Just what else Mr Zelaya might have agreed to is unclear, even to some government officials. Many ordinary Hondurans seem uncertain as to the benefits of ALBA. A recent poll found a sharp fall in Mr Zelaya's approval rating, to just 25%. The opposition abstained when Congress voted on the alliance. Mr Zelaya has sent a timely message to the next American president that he cannot take the loyalty of Central America, a largely impoverished region troubled by organised crime and natural disasters, for granted.

Social and Civil Issues

The effect of religious holiday on the economy is one of those public issues in Latin American particularly in Chile. The latter is predominantly a Catholic state, although in the 2002 census, 15% of Chileans said they were "evangelicals" (a synonym in Latin America for Protestants). State schools now offer a choice of Catholic and evangelical religious teaching, and the armed forces have chaplains from both denominations. Despite the strong footing of Catholicism, Chile set a regional precedent, declaring October 31st a public holiday in honour of "the evangelical and Protestant churches". It marks the date in 1517 when Martin Luther pinned his 95 theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, starting the Protestant Reformation. Only Slovenia and some German states take it as a holiday. What makes the decision to celebrate the Reformation odder is that Chile is the only country in Latin America that still has a significant (Catholic) Christian Democrat party. Nevertheless, the new holiday was approved by a unanimous vote in Congress. The new holiday comes with a price. Chile may have a reputation as boringly hard-working, but now has 16 public holidays a year (plus the "bridge" days that Chileans tack on when a holiday falls near a weekend). A workday's production is worth some \$735m in lost output. So the government wants quietly to drop two of three holidays dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

In Mexico the struggle to combat drug trafficking continues and government has heightened its effort with the mutual support of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). In the recent times, government officials were found complicit in the drug business. The Mexican government has requested the United States to fund the anti-drug effort as drug addiction troubles both countries. At least 4,000 people have been murdered in violence involving traffickers so far this year. Officials say that is a sign that government pressure is having an effect.

Mexican authorities say that since December 2006 they have arrested more than 48,000 traffickers, seizing 69 tonnes of cocaine and more than 24,000 illegal firearms. Mexican officials point out that many of those weapons are bought at gun shops just over the border in the United States. Nevertheless, under Mr Calderón Mexican and American officials have co-operated more closely than ever. A year ago, George Bush asked Congress for an “urgent” \$400m in anti-drug aid for Mexico, to supply helicopters, surveillance kit and training. After months of debate, Congress approved the request but the money has yet to be disbursed. It will be “soon”, promised Condoleezza Rice, the secretary of state, on a visit to Mexico last month intended to show support for Mr Calderón’s battle against the traffickers.

President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia might have gained international and local appraisal for dismembering the FARC leftist militants, but that honour is now tarnished as reports are coming in that the state army was responsible for the kidnapping and killing of many civilians which are added as proof of death count of militants.

In a report recently released, Amnesty International, a human-rights group, says that the security forces were responsible for 330 “extrajudicial executions” last year, up from an average of 220 a year in 2004-06. Amnesty says paramilitaries killed around 300 civilians last year and guerrillas about 260. The government’s own watchdog is investigating 930 suspected killings by the army. To save its face the government has ordered the judiciary to take charge of purging those military generals responsible for the crime and to be tried in civilian court Mr Uribe said “in some parts of the army there has been negligence”.....“There may be members of the armed forces involved in murder.” The government has ordered the attorney-general’s office to investigate, and officials say that any officers who are charged will be tried by civilian, not military, courts.

Argentina President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner went through a roll with farmers accusing the government of intervening in the profit-making of the agricultural sector during the international food crisis. The farmers were able to secure the support of legislators from the ruling Peronist movement to defeat the unpopular bill to increase taxes on farm exports. But now Ms Fernández has found another, far more popular, way to raise funds. A law to nationalise the country’s private pension system was approved by Congress on November 20th, having won the support of some 70% of both houses, including many in the opposition.

Many economists see the measure as a naked government grab for pensioners’ assets. In the month after it was announced on October 20th, the Buenos Aires stockmarket index fell by 27%, and \$4 billion fled the country. Even ordinary Argentines

got the jitters, pulling 5% of their deposits out of banks. Businessmen worry that the government, now the owner of shares equivalent to 13% of Argentina's stockmarket, will seek to place interventionist directors on the boards of private companies.

The government faces a financial squeeze. It must repay \$23 billion of expiring bonds over the next two years that it cannot roll over because investors fear Argentina may be heading for another debt default and are demanding a prohibitive interest rate. Revenues from taxes on farm exports, the government's cash cow, have fallen by a third because of lower world prices for foodstuffs. Having grown by 8% a year for five years, the economy is now slowing sharply.

The mixed blessings of the simple life led by indigenous people deep in the forest are being challenged by the process of development initiated by government of the Amazon region.

The indigenous people in the un-contacted forest of the Amazon are believed to be more protective of the environment than the city or town dwellers. In different part of the Amazon across South America, government have developed policies to keeping the indigenous avoiding the outside world in order to safeguard the natural environment and also to improve their way of life through the provision of certain social infrastructures. However there is great difficulty in ensuring this as the indigenous people wants to remain with their natural and simple life in the forest.

Still in Brazil, where an angle of the civil society, journalism faces opposition, as any aspiring journalist will have to obtain a diploma and register with the labour ministry before acceptance to the fold of journalism. This was one of the remaining laws enacted during military rule of 1967 and remained even when its left in 1985.

The law is believed to provide a useful way to prevent troublemakers from voicing their opinions. It has survived because Brazil is often slow to undo such anachronisms, but also because it suits the journalists' union to keep a closed shop. According to Celso Schröder of the National Federation of Journalists, "The quality of journalism in Brazil would suffer if the rules are changed," as Brazil's journalism is said to be good and robustly independent, particularly when compared with the media in Mexico or Argentina. Yet other holds that it is part of the ruling elite ploy to fence off opposition. According to Donos da Mídia, a monitoring group, 271 politicians (defined as state or federal legislators or mayors) are either directors or partners in media companies. Surprisingly, the two states with the highest incidence of politician-proprietors are Minas Gerais and São Paulo in the developed south-east.

Economic Matters

Brazil status as the largest economy in the region remains incontestable. Over the years the economy has mustered economic growth which further attests to the rational that it is a country ready for investment. The growth of the economy was informed by the record commodity prices and record credit growth. The country's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, declared confidently that "Bush's crisis" in the United States would not affect Brazil. It all looks very different now. Credit is becoming scarcer and banks more

suspicious of each other. Two of the largest, Itaú and Unibanco, announced a merger on November 3rd, creating a bank with combined assets of 575 billion reais (\$263 billion). This will be the biggest bank in Latin America, the sixth-largest in the Americas and in the world's top 20.

The blow on the Brazilian economy indicates that economy recession in the United States can be consequential on neighbouring economies. Brazilian banks are now short of credits and companies are being affected as workers are told to take unpaid leave. With the recognition of its economic problem on neighboring economies like Brazil and others across the world. Washington on October 29th announced a deal with Brazil, Singapore, South Korea and Mexico under which it will provide up to \$30 billion to each of them. These steps seemed to bring some stability to the exchange rate. However the government has been able to maintain an economic balance in view of buoyant reserve before the recession.

Juan de Onis is a former correspondent for The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times who lives in Brazil. He is the author of *The Green Cathedral: Sustainable Development of Amazonia*. According to him with the development made by the governments in the region, it is right time for the world to look towards Latin America particular Brazil in view of its numerous potentials. Brazil is on the cusp of fulfilling its potential as a global player. The next U.S. president should rethink relations with this important country.

The urge for quick money made many Colombians to invest with the owners of Proyecciones DRFE (the Spanish initials for "Fast Easy Money In Cash"), an investment scheme in which hundreds of thousands of Colombians had sunk their savings, had bolted. Tempted by astronomical rates of return, many investors, ranging from poor farmers to wealthy senators, had sold their homes or taken out loans in the hope of watching their money double in just a few months. Some even quit their jobs. Now most had been left virtually penniless. Rioting began after news spread that the company is closing down.

DRFE is one of more than 200 Colombian firms suspected of taking deposits illegally from investors, offering interest rates of up to 300% over just six months. Some act as classic pyramid scams under which the initial investors reap rich profits from other investors they manage to attract. The scheme continues to pay out until new investors stop coming in or the owners decide to skip town. Others are more sophisticated affairs that pose as normal companies selling merchandise, but pay their clients in "points" redeemable in cash after six months. In Bogotá, the capital, officials spent the first few days after the riots blaming one another for failing to prevent the crisis, and Colombia's chief financial regulator resigned. When the government did at last react, on November 17th, it was to declare a state of "social emergency". This allows President Álvaro Uribe to rule by decree. Among the first measures announced is a jump in the maximum prison term for the bosses of such scams from six to 20 years. At the same time mayors and governors have been given new powers to shut down offending firms without wading through the normal mounds of red tape.

The government says it hopes to return cash to investors from money and assets seized from the companies. But as Mr Uribe warned punters in a televised address this week, many still stand to lose their money despite all the government's efforts. So far, 92.4 billion pesos (\$42m) has been seized from DRFE offices, though officials believe the company may have taken as much as \$200m in deposits. DMG's assets have yet to be appraised, but company representatives have already said they do not have the cash to pay back all their investors. Not all Colombians are opposed to the investment firms. While some have looted the companies who scammed them, others have organised marches in support of what they call "the banks of the poor". Commercial banks tend to offer low interest rates and charge exorbitant fees.

According to Rafael Correa, Ecuador's president, one of the benefits of the world financial crisis has been an end to annoying visits by "yuppies" from ratings agencies and investment banks holding Ecuadorean debt.

On November 15th his government delayed a \$30.6m interest payment on part of its foreign debt of \$10 billion. Five days later it released the report of a committee it set up to audit all of the country's debt contracts between 1976 and 2006. The committee says it found widespread evidence of malfeasance, particularly in three sets of bonds with a total value of \$3.9 billion. "Horrifying", said Mr Correa. Some of his supporters want former presidents who signed the debt agreements to be jailed. They also want the government not to pay the debt.

Mr Correa, who calls himself a Christian Socialist, claims to be defending a principle. He has said that Ecuador will default only if it concludes that it could win subsequent lawsuits against bondholders. That looks unlikely. So one theory is that the whole exercise is aimed at driving down the value of the questioned bonds—they now trade at less than a third of face value so the government can either buy them back or force a debt renegotiation. Ricardo Patiño, a former finance minister who took part in the audit, suggested that investors should accept a write-down of more than 60% in the bonds' value.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Weekly Presentation: December 17, 2008

South, Central America and the Caribbean

Bakare Najimdeen

Period: From December 7th -13th, 2008

Democratization and Political Issues

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Environment

More destructive hurricanes, shrinking forests, melting glaciers, disappearing animals: the prospective damage to Latin America and the Caribbean from climate change makes for grim reading. A new World Bank report, timed to coincide with a United Nations conference in Poland, tries to put numbers to the potential economic cost. ("Low Carbon, High Growth: Latin American Responses to Climate Change," by Augusto de la Torre, Pablo Fajnzylber and John Nash.) By taking the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's predictions for what the planet might feel like in 2100 and then overlaying data from several thousand farms situated in regions of varying heat and dryness, it is possible to make some informed guesses about what the effect on crop yields, and therefore on GDP, would be if temperatures rose and rainfall fell.

Some places in the southern cone of Latin America would gain from such a change. But more would lose out: the authors reckon that left unchecked, climate change might cause a fall of 12-50% in farm revenues by the end of the century. According to another study, this could mean an annual cut in GDP of 0.23-0.56%. This would worsen rural poverty. It would also entail the shrinking of a number of habitats, whose eventual disappearance would in turn speed up the process of global warming. Four are in the front line: Mexico's Gulf-coast wetlands; the Andean glaciers; parts of the Amazon; and Caribbean

coral reefs (they expel tiny algae when sea temperatures rise, which eventually kills them). An increase in malaria in rural areas and dengue fever in cities completes a gloomy picture.

Some Latin American countries are already doing things to reduce net carbon emissions that put them ahead of governments elsewhere. Much of the region's power comes from hydroelectricity and biofuels. The result is that emissions of carbon dioxide per unit of power are 74% lower than in India and China. There are obstacles to taking these policies further. In Brazil, plans for more hydroelectric dams in the Amazon are opposed by some environmentalists; they claim the resulting flooding of forest prompts methane-producing rotting vegetation. Oil producers in the region stoke emissions by subsidising petrol: it is cheaper in Venezuela than anywhere except Kuwait.

But almost half of the region's emissions come from changes in land use, as forests and grasslands are turned into farms. By contrast, this accounts for only 17% of emissions in the rest of the world. A report for the British government by (Lord) Nicholas Stern, an economist, identified these emissions as cheaper to prevent than most other kinds. Perhaps: "Lord Stern probably does not have a tropical forest to protect," sniffs a Brazilian diplomat. The economic downturn may make this harder, cutting government environmental spending. But a fall in the price of farm commodities may ease the pressure on the forest. Most of the governments with a toe in the Amazon now accept that they should seek foreign money for schemes to ensure that trees are worth more standing up than they are lying down. All that needs to be done is to find a way to make this work on the front line where the loggers meet the forest, and then to get the rest of the world to pay up. All of these pointing to the fact that the Amazon must be protected and deforestation in the region should be abated.

Economic Matter

Mexico

The economy recession in the United States has not only endanger works and economy in the United States but it is also affecting the fabrics of neighbouring countries economies. The economy recession is also affecting immigration across the border and immigrants working in the United States. Many prospective immigrants have failed in their attempt crossing the border into the US on one hand while immigrants are losing their jobs due to the recession and that is also affecting foreign remittance.

Chincua, a village of some 700 people, is typical of the Mexican state of Michoacan, where remittances from migrant workers account for 12% of the local economy. The recession up north in the United States bites in rural Mexico

Recession across the border means that remittances to Mexico fell by 4.2% between January and August compared with the same period last year, according to the World Bank. Surprisingly, Mexico's central bank reckons this trend was bucked in October,

when remittances rose sharply. Yet that might be ominous: the rise may come from migrants who have lost their jobs repatriating their savings before returning home.

According to the Pew Hispanic Centre, a think-tank in Washington, DC, the number of illegal immigrants in the United States has levelled off (at just under 12m) after years of growth. That is partly because of the American recession, but also because it is harder to cross the border. Mrs Cerezero and her husband tried repeatedly earlier this year but were caught each time. Now they have given up. Many people in Chincua have opted to stay at home with their families even if that means staying poor, says the village priest.

Brazil

In the five years from 2004 Latin America's economies grew at an annual average rate of over 5%, inflation remained generally low, credit expanded and exports boomed. All this meant that the proportion of people living in poverty fell from 44% in 2002 to 33% this year, according to an estimate this week by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Now the task facing the region's policymakers is to limit the damage as the world economy deflates.

Until September Latin Americans could still hope that they would escape the worst of the downturn. Brazil's economy, for example, grew by 6.8% in the third quarter compared with the same period last year, while Peru's GDP expanded by 10% in the year to September. But in the past two months, Latin America has seen its stockmarkets crash, currencies wobble and credit start to dry up. That comes on top of falling exports and the plunge in the prices of the commodities it sells to the world. Twisting the knife, less money is being sent home by Latin Americans working abroad

Two things lie behind the bleaker outlook. The first is the continuing steep fall in commodity prices because of worries that China's economy is stalling. Commodities, from Venezuelan oil to Peruvian minerals, Argentine soya and Brazilian iron ore and orange juice, make up a big chunk of the region's exports.

The second dampener is that banks in Latin America have turned cautious. Many foreign banks are cancelling credit lines to the region, or renewing them for shorter periods or at higher rates. That may be to shore up their battered finances at home, but local banks seem to be following suit. "What's new is that until recently credit was seen as a shock absorber. We're discovering that the link between the world and Latin America is still very strong," says Gray Newman of Morgan Stanley. As investors flee risk, financing conditions for governments have tightened too. The answer is maybe. Many of the larger economies are entering the slowdown with stronger fiscal and balance-of-payments positions than in the past (see chart). That is a tribute to lessons learnt the hard way. Governments have slimmed their debt and shifted much of it into local currency, so at least currency weakening does not automatically increase the fiscal burden. Unlike their peers in the rich countries, many of the region's central banks raised their benchmark interest rates earlier this year as higher food and fuel prices caused inflation to spike.

Most forecasters expect Latin America to bounce back in 2010. Perhaps the biggest risk in the region is of abandoning the recent commitment to prudence. That has never been universal, as Argentina's recent nationalisation of private pension funds showed. It would be tragic if a slowdown triggered by outside events led Latin America to throw away the economic stability it has worked so hard to achieve.

Political Issues

Peru

Economic growth in Peru the country claim to be the fastest growing economy in the region is breeding hatred against the government. Many Peruvians are discontented with the government due to the corrupt practice and indifferent attitude towards their demand. Many concern mines or oil exploration. In the recent times violent protest has enveloped the country, the protesters either don't want mines or oil exploration, or want them to pay more money to local communities. Some concern government infrastructure projects not in my backyard, or yes in my backyard and on no account in my neighbour's. Others range from strikes to demands for better bus services or the ejection of corrupt officials.

The President Alan García often blames the protests on agitators from small far-left parties, and on Ollanta Humala, a nationalist former army officer whom he narrowly defeated in the presidential election of 2006. Officials have hinted (without proof) that Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez, funds such groups. Mr Humala in turn accuses the government of trying to distract attention from its own incompetence.

Certainly far-left activists can be found in the bigger disputes. But many of the conflicts are very local in nature, and it is hard to see them as forming part of a concerted attempt to undermine democracy or the market economy. They are getting more violent because people have seen that more can be squeezed from the government by throwing stones or setting fire to police stations than simply by marching through the streets, says Fernando Rospigliosi, a former interior minister.

Above all the protests dramatise the shortcomings of Peru's political system. According to Ipsos Apoyo, a pollster, 88% of people surveyed said they support the protests as long as they are non-violent. Peruvians know that there is money about: the economy grew by 10% in the year to September. But many also know that they are not receiving much of it. Many of the protests are in the Andes, where big mines may coexist with subsistence farming. The problem is that Peru's political parties are failing to channel the demands, conflicts and frustrations that rapid economic growth is throwing up. The worry is that as the economy slows along with the world's, blocking roads and throwing stones will become an even more integral part of the Peruvian way of life.