

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

*The text of an Address delivered by the President, Tariq Solaija at the Opening Session of the Council Meeting at the Eighth Annual Conference of the FOSIS.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Eighth Annual Council Meeting of the Federation. In particular I would like to welcome and introduce a new affiliate of the FOSIS—the University of Southampton Islamic Society. The Society, though it has been taking a keen interest in the activities of the Federation for some time now, has been granted affiliation fairly recently. I hope and pray to Allah, that the members of this constituent and of all other constituents will be able to give their best in the service of Islam, and in doing so contribute significantly to the Federation.

For the benefit of our new members, and in order to bring home certain points to others in general, it may be appropriate to delineate briefly the *raison d'être* and the scope of the Federation. Such a brief reminder is not only appropriate but necessary at this stage in the history of the Federation.

The Federation came into existence in 1962 when groups of students from Birmingham, Dublin, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Wolverhampton met in Birmingham. This was a deviation from the established pattern of patronised student organisations. Although this meant greater sacrifice, both in terms of finance and time, on the part of its students, it assured the complete independence of FOSIS. Nine years of existence of the Federation amply bears this fact out: in the most difficult of situations the FOSIS was able to maintain an independent stand on all issues. Whether on issues affecting students, or the wider aspects of the Muslim world, the Federation was not vulnerable to outside manipulations and this was mainly because of the fact that it preserved its character as an independent student body. This has

allowed the Federation to concentrate on problems and projects in depth, and not to be sidetracked into problems it could not take up effectively.

So the delegates must be keenly aware of the nature of FOSIS as a student organisation and that its main and primary concern is and should be the Muslim students in this country. This, however, never has prevented and should not prevent FOSIS members from effectively contributing to community work. In fact many an example can be given where the Federation members have always been in close contact with the community. One such case is FOSIS's concern about the education of Muslim children; FOSIS students can be found organising many week-end schools for teaching. But for the Federation to exist and build itself on firmer ground it is vital that it should have a clear idea of its scope and limitations. Another example one can quote, which is particularly relevant when we are meeting in Manchester, where through the active co-operation of students, the Manchester Community has been able to start a mosque project. We hope, insha Allah, it would be one of the most useful projects undertaken by the community. But by its very nature the main contribution of the Federation would be in the field of the welfare of the student community where it has its base.

The problems of Muslim students in this country are of a gravity to occupy the attention of the FOSIS almost full time. And yet in this very field when one compares the contribution of FOSIS constituents with other ideological groups, at campuses, in universities, and institutions up and down the country it is almost non-existent. All issues of student welfare such as education fees, student grants, standards, syllabi, accommodation, etc., are taken up invariably by left-wing student organisations. This concern of left-wing organisations about student problems, pays its dividends, in that more and more students are attracted by and

become committed to these organisations. Perhaps the implications of this are not very clear to us at present or may be it does not concern us and some may dispute this. But in a few years time when the population of Muslim university students, brought up in this country, will become sizeable we will realise the seriousness of an indifference to student problems—but then it will be too late. FOSIS, if it is to grow and it has to grow, in sha Allah, must draw up plans to cope with this situation—and put them into effect.

It may be justified to a great extent if one accuses the Federation of being an inward looking body, concerning itself only with a few committed souls and preaching to the converted, and this too only in a limited sphere. Unless this outlook of FOSIS members and hence the image of the Federation change to an outward looking and progressive organisation, its appeal would remain very much restricted, or to speak the truth, non-existent for the generation of Muslim students brought up in this country. Yet these are the very people on whom the future of the Federation depends.

These students will not be satisfied merely with societies having prayer facilities or observing Islamic festivals or holding lectures or conferences. They would like to see, and rightly so, the Islamic way of life as a whole to be implemented, and Islamic societies thriving with life, taking up issues affecting students as effectively as non-Muslim student bodies. Not only that they would like to be pace-setters and fore-runners in a few projects and in new fields. I am afraid that if the present attitude of verbalism and indifference and apathy continue, a large number of these Muslim students will take refuge with socialists and drop-outs. And this has happened to a degree already. Many a University has hundreds of Muslim students, but the number attending Islamic society functions hardly exceeds thirty or forty. This is not being alarmist. It is something that we have to prepare ourselves for. We have to see that our students are motivated by Islam and that they are guided right on the path of Islam.

The picture however is not all that gloomy as it may sound. Al hamdu lillah, during the last year, we were able to make some strides forward in consolidating ourselves. The executive committee has taken the Council recommendations with much more seriousness and tried its best to implement as many of them as possible. There is at present a greater awareness among the FOSIS members about the activities and

problems of the Federation, although apathy and indifference still predominate. The FOSIS-constituent relationships are better now than when the new executive took charge. The Secretary's report will give a detailed account of the steps taken in this connection. To mention a few: the publications of FOSIS internal News Bulletin, the Brochure, the holding of regional meetings, and visits by various members of the Executive to a number of constituents. While talking of indifference and apathy one good case of it is the poor response of the constituents to the circulars sent from the H.Q. and to the internal News Bulletin. Not a single comment either in the form of commendation or criticism was received from any constituent. However, overseas links are on a better footing. One testimony to this is that our conference shall be attended by representatives from three overseas student organisations.

Much more could have been achieved if some senior members had not been bogged down with routine work such as replying to enquiries, typing and sending circulars. But that needed funds and it is sad that not many constituents fulfilled their solemn pledges made at Bristol Conference to contribute to the FOSIS equipment fund. Financial difficulties severely curtailed our activities. Preoccupations with administrative work did not allow much time for planning, although the Council approved the hiring of a part-time secretary. Due to the fact that many societies did not take the Federation Equipment Appeal Fund seriously, the Federation could not even purchase its own Gestetner machine, and is using a borrowed machine.

During the year, the Executive made many decisions. One of the major decisions was that of joining the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations (I.I.F.S.O.). Lastly, I would like to say a few words about the role delegates should play in and after the Council meetings. There are four major tasks for which you are here: to evaluate critically a year's achievements; to plan for future years; to elect office-bearers for the coming year; to convey the recommendations and suggestions of the Council to your own constituents, and to see that they are implemented.

As far as the criticism of the year is concerned you must keep in mind the scope and limitations of the Federation. It is in the light of the recommendations of last council that you have to judge. Criticism is your right, but it possesses a certain etiquette. Criticism should be constructive, and levelled for the welfare of



the organisation. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has said that if anyone criticises his brother for the purpose of degradation, then his place would be Jahannam. It has also been Islamic practise that criticism is lodged in a brotherly spirit: a concern for his welfare must be there. On the other hand, it is commanded to those who are responsible, that they must accept criticism in the spirit it is offered... One of the hadith which aptly illustrates this principle is: "One believer is the mirror to another; one believer is the brother of another believer". It goes without saying that the purpose of the mirror is to reflect the actual picture—not to exaggerate faults or belittle qualities...

The second task is to plan for the future. This again must be done coolly and rationally. Group discussions must be attended after thorough preparation, so that when we emerge after three hours, we do so with concrete and realistic proposals.

Thirdly, you would be electing new office-bearers, which is one of the greatest of respon-

sibilities. It is not only the plans and proposals which are important, but the men who are to implement them. Needless to say, Muslims would only progress if they follow the principle, 'the best of you shall lead the community'. What you have to look for is piety; an understanding of problems; experience in involvement with Islamic work. None of these in isolation is sufficient. Only if we choose right office-bearers can we hope for a better future for the Federation.

Lastly, we should be aware of becoming over-enthusiastic when together, and forgetting our commitments to recommendations when we disperse. May I remind you what God, all praise be to Him, says; "Oh believers why do you say what you do not? Indeed the most hated in the sight of Allah are those who say what they do not".

With these words, and with the prayer that God gives us all the strength, courage and determination to work for His cause, I would like to conclude.

## Conference Recommendations

### Group One: **THE FOSIS—REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION**

*Chairman: Jamil Sherief*

*Secretary: M. H Razik*

The meeting began with a review of Constituent activities. A table, indicating the membership, number of meetings held, Constituent response to circulars, donation to equipment fund, numbers of *The Muslim* sold, and Eid card sales for every society in the Federation was read out. It was made up-to-date with additional information supplied by participants of the Group. From this data the group attempted to build up a profile of a typical Federation Constituent.

With this in view, and after analysing carefully the results of the Seventh Annual Conference Group One recommendations, the Group proposed the following:

#### **Recommendations from the review**

1. In order to allow for a statistical evaluation of Constituent activities the Executive Com-

mittee should send a questionnaire three times a year to constituents.

2. To enable an exchange of information to take place, the Group recommended that each Constituent appoint someone with the responsibility of writing a monthly report of activities, to be submitted to the FOSIS Headquarters.

3. To facilitate the maintenance of Constituent correspondence with the Headquarters, the Group recommended that each Constituent should keep a separate file for all its correspondence with FOSIS. This file is to be supplied by the Headquarters.

4. Considering the poor response to the Equipment Fund, the Group recommended that the Executive of Constituents approach their individual members and urge them to raise money. As an immediate response, the group recommended that a fund be opened at the Conference.

5. The Executive Committee of the Federation should re-issue the *Members Particulars Card*