

The Theology of Liberation

Islam has been in the forefront of the struggle against colonial penetration in the first place, and has been instrumental in regaining independence. The liberation potential on Islam was the theme of a recent conference organised by the Islamic Council. **M Iqbal Asaria** reports.

THE proceedings start by a moving recitation of the Qur'an by the blind Egyptian scholar, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. (Sadat - that Zionist in our midst - called him 'a dog'.) Listen to Sheikh Omar's recitation of the Qur'an and you'll see why the Egyptian people did not even bother to say the *janaza* prayer on Sadat. The venue was the International Conference Centre of Geneva, the occasion was the International Conference on *Islam: The Liberating Force* organised by the Islamic Council, on 10-11 March 1986.

In his opening address, Salem Azzam, the Secretary General of the Islamic Council, set the scene by outlining three main areas of concern to the Muslims. He talked of aggression by stronger nations against weaker ones, quoting the Israeli usurpation of Palestine, Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Next he mentioned the curse of racism, quoting in particular the Apartheid regime in South Africa and Zionism in Occupied Palestine. Finally, he talked of the violation of human rights mentioning the rise of state terrorism outside the totalitarian countries. In particular reference was made to US attacks on a Libyan plane, US hijacking of an Egyptian airliner and Israeli raid on PLO headquarters in Tunis. The Secretary General then went on to outline the role of Islam in eradicating oppression of all kinds. He laid emphasis on the example of Iran to lift internal tyranny, and on the struggle of the Afghan *mujahdeen* to resist external aggression. Concluding his opening address, he said that most of the Muslim world was suffering from rigged elections, manipulated Parliamentary majorities and faked oppositions not allowing the political process to be embedded in the people.

He called for a fuller implementation of Islam to enable the liberation of contemporary Muslim world to proceed swiftly.

A K Brohi, the well-known Pakistani jurist, opened the first session with a thought-provoking talk on *Islam the Liberator of Man*. He argued that Islam had provided a solid basis for the liberation of man. As an individual, it had laid down a programme to liberate him from slavery both physical and spiritual. Once liberated and bowing to none other than Allah - his Creator - man was a powerful agent for the liberation of society as a whole. Thus only by the liberation of the individual can society on a communal, national and global level be liberated.

In his account of the struggle of the Algerian people, the first president of Independent Algeria, Ahmed Ben Bella, gave an account of the role of Islam in resisting French colonisation of the country in the nineteenth century, and in ejecting the French in the 1960s. *Ulema* like Amir Abdel Qadir were in the forefront of the struggle of resistance to French colonialism, and the struggle for Independence was greatly aided by figures like Sheikh Ben Badis of the *Ulema* Association. Upwards of three million Algerian Muslims were martyred in the two phases of the struggle. Ben Bella gave a graphic account of the over 100 years of French rule, and showed the primacy of Islam in inspiring the Algerian people to finally overcome their colonisers.

The two phases of the struggle waged by Muslims of the sub-continent were also emphasised by Professor Khurshid Ahmed, when he talked on *Islam the basis of the Pakistan Movement*. He showed how resistance during British attempts to colonise the Indian subcontinent was

led by the Muslims and again how they contributed to the independence movement. Professor Khurshid also tried to show how secularism has been imposed forcibly on Muslims, at times with considerable loss of life, and definitely by massive suppression of freedoms.

Hassan al Tell from Jordan, delivered one of the most forthright papers on *Islam and the Liberation of Palestine*. In his scholarly presentation he surveyed the history of Zionist penetration of Palestine and the efforts of Muslims so far to redress the humiliations visited upon them. He was categorical in stating that the present policies of accommodation with the US and Zionist Israel would lead nowhere and were nothing but deceitful episodes in our history. He advocated a liberation struggle under the banner of Islam.

It was also good to see Necmettin Erbakan, after his long sojourn in Prison, again beginning to find his feet for his struggle to establish Islam as a political force in Turkey. He outlined the achievements of the *Melli Selamat Party* (The National Salvation Party) in the seventies, in awakening the Islamic aspirations of the Turkish Muslims. In particular, he mentioned the salvation of the Turkish-Cypriots, the challenging of links with Zionist Israel, and the increase in Islamic education in the country. Under the new circumstances, the *Rafah* party was carrying on the banner of the NSP, and would continue to exert pressure for the Turkish polity to recognise Islam as a principal political force in the country.

There was also a presentation by Dr A K Tabibi, a former Afghan ambassador to many European countries on *Islam and the Struggle of the Afghan People*. He recounted the long history of Islam in Afghanistan, and the distinguished service rendered by Afghans to the various Islamic dynasties. However, his prescription for modern-day Afghanistan fell short of an Islamic state. This was duly redressed by a moving supplementary address by Dr Amanyar, the European representative of the Afghan *Mujahdeen*.

Pride of place was, however, reserved for Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman. Here was a leading Egyptian scholar, in the midst of the mutiny by the security forces, delivering a most forceful and forthright speech on the need for a complete implementation of the *Shari'ah* in his country. Sheikh Omar recounted the experience of Arab countries with Arab Nationalism



A view of the delegates, with Professor Erbakhan in the front



(from left) Sheikh Omar, Sheikh Hafez, Hassan Ramadan and Salem Azzam, at the lunch table

and Ba'athism and found them to be wanting and devoid of delivering genuine independence. The humiliation visited upon Egypt by Zionist victories, and US hegemony was killing the patience of the people, he said. Sheikh Omar, who is said to have inspired Khalid Istambouli and Suleman Khater, is clearly a powerful force to be reckoned with. He has spent most of the last decade in prison, and regularly attends the trials of Muslims accused of 'fundamentalism'. He has been known to harangue the judges about the lack of concrete charges

against these brave Muslims, and often secure their release.

Some of the scenes during the conference were of great interest. Thus we witnessed Sheikh Hafez Salamah, the well-known campaigner for the implementation of the Sha'ria in Egypt, nodding vigorously at Ahmed Ben Bella, making his most forthright exposition of the indelible role of Islam in the Algerian Revolution. Or again, it was fascinating to sit at the lunch table with people like Sheikh Omar Abd ar Rahman, Sheikh Hafez Salameh, and others discussing the

struggle of the Muslims and their varying prescriptions for action.

Also present as a delegate was Abdul Helim Hassan Ramadan, the veteran Egyptian lawyer, who conducted the defence of Khalid Istambouli and Suleman Khater. A man of pleasing disposition and intense humour, Hassan recounted the Government's version of Suleman Khatir's 'suicide'. It was evident that nobody apart from the government believed in this version, and Suleman Khatir had already secured a place as an initiator of the campaign to undo the Camp David Accords. Hassan Ramadan was cognisant of the fact that one day he may also be said to have committed 'suicide' in the manner of Suleman Khater.

Having recounted, the liberation potential of Islam, as manifested by the struggle of the Muslim peoples across the breadth of the globe, the Conference was successful in giving a sense of purpose and the oneness of their struggle to the participants. Amongst the resolutions included in the final *communiqué* were the following:

***Palestine and Al Quds**

Asserting that the problem of the entire land of Palestine and Al Quds is an Islamic issue and that their total liberation is the sacred duty of Muslims the world over;

Call upon all Muslim peoples to prevail upon their governments to coordinate and mobilize their economic, political and military resources for the liberation of Palestine and Al Quds.

***Gulf War**

Reiterating our previous strong condemnation of the Saddam regime as the aggressor in the Gulf War;

Call upon the two Muslim countries to end the conflict in true Islamic spirit, which does not admit nationalism or chauvinism and seeks to resolve differences between members of the Islamic family on the foundations of justice, equality, brotherhood, solidarity and the welfare of the Muslim people.

***Islamic Order**

Affirming that it is our Islamic duty to establish an Islamic order in Muslim lands, ensuring the implementation of the Sha'ria in all fields of individual and collective life;

Call upon Muslim peoples, Islamic movements and organisations to intensify their efforts and struggle for the fulfilment of their Islamic duty to establish the Islamic order in their lands.