

Iran Program – Fostering Relationship through Discussion on Islamic Sources of Peace and Nonviolence

Following an initial trip to Iran in October of 2007, where scholars from Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) met with Iranian Scholars to discuss peace, conflict resolution, and theoretical and practical approaches to peacemaking, it was decided that the continuation of such dialogue between scholars was needed. Believing that continued scholarly exchange will contribute to research, publication, and significant future exchanges on the important subject of Muslim approaches to peace and non-violence, upon return to the United States the idea of a second exchange, this time of Iranian Scholars to the U.S. , was developed (Phase Two of the program). Junior level scholars were then identified with the assistance of our partner contacts in Iran and a 15-person contingent of Iranians visited the United States in May 2008.

While in Washington , D.C. , May 2008 program participants meet with NGO representatives and think tank analysts for briefings on the status of current initiatives to resolve international conflicts. They met with religious leaders, in particular members of the Muslim and Christian faiths, to discuss their efforts at interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution. They examined current humanitarian operations, peacekeeping activities, and economic development programs through participation in American University 's Summer Peace-building and Development Institute (PDI). Briefings with conflict resolution professors from American University , the U.S. Institute of Peace, and George Mason University also provided an opportunity to focus on the various theories of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, as well as on post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

The five-day training seminar arranged at the PDI at America University included participants from around the world. Topics covered included “Religion and Culture in Conflict Resolution,” “Applied Conflict Analysis and Negotiation,” and “Youth, Conflict, and Peace-building.” The Iranian scholar's participation in these seminars was both helpful to them in planning for their work back home, and well received by those from other regions who participated in the PDI program. Many PDI participants commented on how beneficial it was to have the perspective of the Iranians in their group discussion and strategic planning.

The Salam Institute's phased plan for the continuation of the Iran program includes continued exchange between senior scholars through a planned closed-door academic conference in Turkey January 2009 (Phase Three) followed by a mid-2009 exchange of ideas and best practices among University administrators on developing conflict resolution programs and teaching conflict resolution skills (Phase Four). This fourth phase of the program will involve developing a sustainable partnership between American and Iranian Academic Institutions.

This four-phased Iranian program plan is aimed at fostering and sustaining people-to-people dialogue, as well as skills transfer on Islamic principles of peace. An example of

the success of this objective occurred when the May 2008 program participants visited three cities (New York , Louisville , and Seattle) outside of Washington , DC . This varied experience of American culture allowed participants to share a much richer experience with American colleagues and citizens than would have been possible if they had come only for PDI seminars. Providing the May 2008 participants with an opportunity to meet average people in large and mid-sized American cities, it is this type of people-to-people sharing that Salam Institute is committed to continuing. As this is an on-going project Salam Institute is continually looking for those interested in supporting this important work. We encourage you to contact us for more information about how you can assist.