



**The Interfaith Alliance**  
LONG ISLAND CHAPTER  
[www.interfaithalliance-li.org](http://www.interfaithalliance-li.org)



### **Minutes – Meeting of 7/16/2009**

**Attendance:** Mark Lukens, Chair; Sameer Abdullah; Habeeb Ahmed; Seemi Ahmed; Irfan Amin; Ronnie Around; Faroque Khan; Marty Melkonian; Habeebuddin Mohammed; Dolores Tibbets; Rich Tibbets; Kausar Zaman.

Mark called the meeting to order at 2:15 pm.

**Minutes:** Members have received the minutes for both the April and June meetings (no minutes in May as that was the Clergy Luncheon).

**Treasurer's Report:** Dolores Tibbets reported \$70 income and \$10 expenses since our last meeting and a current balance of \$1,583.67

**TIA-LI Presentations to Local Mosques:** Mark Lukens spoke about a meeting of several TIA members to discuss outreach by TIA to the local Muslim community. The meeting was prompted by a discussion at last month's meeting about the alienation, isolation and harassment which many first generation Muslims experience in this country. Meeting attendees included Habeeb Ahmed, Syed Asad, Mark Lukens, Paul Auerbach and Richard Tibbets.

The purpose of that meeting was to plan a presentation which TIA will make at local mosques to let the Muslim population know that they have friends and supporters in the local non-Muslim community. We are particularly interested in getting religious leaders of the various faith communities on Long Island involved in this effort, as well as encouraging these leaders to discuss issues relating to Muslim/non-Muslim dialogue with their respective congregations.

In addition to having non-Muslim faith groups reach out to Muslims, Sameer Abdullah noted that Muslims must also reach out to other faiths communities. One way Muslims can do that is to teach non-Muslims about Islam and to stress its focus on both love of God and love of neighbor. In addition, Muslims can show both Christians and Jews that Islam theology shares much in common with them, including its desire to follow the teachings of the Hebrew prophets, as well as the words of Jesus.

Both Marty Melkonian and Habeeb Ahmed noted a need for contact between Muslims and non-Muslims in social gatherings, in addition to settings focused upon religious issues.

Faroque Khan stressed the need for Muslims to maintain close contacts with the leadership of other religions, noting that Mark Lukens and Tom Goodhue spoke out loudly in defense of Muslims when they were attacked by Congressman Peter King.

Mark noted that many of the problems facing Muslims in this society are caused by (1) a general fear of the unknown and (2) Muslim baiting by some politicians as a political tactic to gain votes.

Planning for these presentations is still underway, and we will update the membership on this evolving work at our next regularly scheduled TIA meeting.

**Nuclear Disarmament:** Marty Melkonian spoke about a major effort to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nuclear Disarmament treaty this year. The World March for Peace and Nonviolence will run from October 2, 2009 through January 2, 2010. For more information, go to the website [www.worldmarchusa.net](http://www.worldmarchusa.net) or contact the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives at (516) 741-4360.

**Hate Crimes Legislation:** Rich noted that the Interfaith Alliance national office has asked us to call our U.S. Senators in support of the “Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act.” This bill would expand coverage of the current law, as well as provide federal assistance to local police. Mark noted that the bill outlaws hate crimes, not hate speech. It does not limit what preachers may say in their pulpits, but it does put pressure on municipalities to prosecute hate crimes.

*NOTE: Some days after the TIA meeting, this bill was passed by the Senate and sent to President Obama for signature. Visit the website [www.interfaithalliance.org](http://www.interfaithalliance.org) for more details.*

**State of Belief:** Rich mentioned that the June 13<sup>th</sup> edition of Interfaith Alliance’s *State of Belief* radio program featured a discussion between Welton Gaddy, national president of the Alliance, with author Asra Nomani about gender equality in Islam at her West Virginia mosque. Nomani has written several books, including *Standing Alone in Mecca*, which tells the story of her pilgrimage to Mecca for the hajj. A review by Booklist notes:

*“Nomani’s riveting, cogent, and inspiring account urges the moderate majority in all faiths to rescue their traditions from those who twist religion into a weapon of mass oppression and terror.” – Booklist*

See the website [www.asranomani.com](http://www.asranomani.com) for more information about Asra Nomani.

**Fr. Henry Benack:** Marty spoke about the wonderful ceremony held by Pax Christi to honor Fr. Henry Benack, TIA-LI Vice President and long time peace activist. Marty and several other TIA members were pleased to recall Fr Benack’s many years of active support of local efforts to build bridges among faith communities and for his steadfast stands at numerous peace and justice marches over the years.

**Norma Cohen:** Ronnie Arond mentioned that she visited Norma at her home recently. For the benefit of those new attendees who don’t know her well, Ronnie told how vital Norma has been to TIA-LI, calling her a “giant.” Those who know Norma all agreed whole-heartedly. Seemi Ahmed suggested that we purchase flowers for Norma, and the members voted to authorize Dolores to send flowers from our chapter.

We paused to say a prayer for the success of Norma’s therapy so she may return to her active and vibrant ways.

**Kausar Zaman:** Dolores announced that Kausar has made a most generous donation to TIA-LI in honor of her son who recently completed his medical education. Kausar told the group that her son had been born with a major handicap, but worked hard to overcome this problem, and achieved great success in medical school. We were all moved by her story, and it was most obvious that Kausar is very proud of her son.

Respectfully submitted,  
Richard Tibbets

### **NEXT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE MEETING**

The next TIA meeting will be:

**Thursday, September 10<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm  
at the Islamic Center of Long Island**

835 Brush Hollow Road  
Westbury, NY 11590  
Telephone: 516-333-3495

Call the Islamic Center for directions, or visit the website:

[www.icliny.org/directions.php](http://www.icliny.org/directions.php)

**Lecture on Islam:** Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, noted Egyptian teacher and author, will present a lecture at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue on Thursday, November 12 at 7:30 P.M. The lecture, "Islam in the 21st Century," is part of the college's effort to promote interfaith dialogue.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, call 631-447-8252 or visit the website [www.interfaithalliance-li.org](http://www.interfaithalliance-li.org)