

THE STRONG INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN BRITISH CULTURE

HM Ambassador writes an article every three weeks in the Arabic language Al Riyadh newspaper. This piece was published on 22 September 2008.

On the evening of Saturday 20 September I very much enjoyed welcoming 150 guests to my home in Riyadh for Iftar. This was an opportunity for me to express and share with my Saudi and other Muslim friends my admiration and best wishes for the Holy Month of Ramadan.

It was also an opportunity to reflect on the Iftars happening far away from the Two Holy Places. Across Britain, from Glasgow to London, British Muslims have spent this Ramadan in fasting, prayer and contemplation. And they come together every evening to break their fast and to celebrate their religion. At the same time many thousands of British Muslims are enjoying hospitality here in Makkah and Madinah as they perform Umrah and Taraweeh.

Muslims in Britain are as varied a group of people as Muslims in any country. They are ministers and



teachers. They support Blackburn and Chelsea football teams. They have Arab, Asian and African roots, and there are many indigenous Muslims. Some

vote for the Labour Party, others for the Conservatives, and still others for the Liberal Democrats. But each day during Ramadan they all turn to Makkah five times a day and join Muslims around the world in prayer.

They have a unique identity. Both Muslim and British. In no other country in Europe do Muslims play such a varied and important role. Of the two million Muslims in Britain there are TV presenters, police officers, heads of companies, politicians and small business owners.

Any job you can name, there are Muslims in Britain doing it. Their contributions are now a crucial part of British society. Britain needs and values its Muslim citizens.



As those of you who have visited Britain know, the British people have welcomed Islam. The largest mosque in Europe is in London. The government funds Muslim schools. Halal food is available in shops and restaurants throughout Britain. And the government has just appointed 20 Muslim advisers to work closely with Ministers as they formulate and implement government policy. The British Government also supports the British Hajj delegation, which offers unique support to British Pilgrims. This is the only project of its kind in the Western world.

To me the depth and strength of Muslim culture in Britain is no surprise. Muslim roots in Britain stretch back 1000 years. The first British person we know of who converted to Islam, John Nelson, did so 500 years ago. The first ever translation of the Holy Qu'ran into English was done by a fellow Scot, Alexander Ross, 350 years ago. Islam has been part of British culture for a very long time.

So we have some experience of the importance of dialogue between faiths. Which is why I applaud the Interfaith dialogue, started by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The three religions of the book share an important history. By working together we can ensure a peaceful and prosperous future.

I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a blessed Ramadan. I hope that as you break your fast this evening, you will think of those British Muslims, far away from the Two Holy Places, who are breaking their fasts too.