

POLICING THE HAJJ

VISIT BY SENIOR BRITISH MUSLIM POLICE OFFICER TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Assistant Chief Constable Jawaid Akhtar

In January 2006, at the invitation of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Naif, deputy Minister of Interior of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Assistant Chief Constable Jawaid Akhtar of the West Yorkshire Police, one of Britain's most senior Muslim police officers, visited Saudi Arabia to observe the policing of the Hajj.

ACC Akhtar began by visiting the Public Security Department (PSD) control room in Makkah. He met General Abdul Aziz Bin Saeed, the Deputy Head of PSD, who supervises the policing operations for the whole of the Hajj, covering the areas of Mina, Arafat, Muzzalfah and the Jamarat Bridge. He was impressed by the well-equipped control room, with an extensive network of CCTV screens "In essence the control room can monitor all of the areas being visited by the Pilgrims", ACC Akhtar said, "The control room also has people from the various other Ministries, eg, Hajj, Health, Finance, Transport and in effect can be described as the equivalent of the Gold Command Room in UK policing. Interestingly, there is also a direct link to the Immigration Department computer system. This facility can be used to check on the status of any foreign national, the full details of where they are staying, country of origin etc".

ACC Akhtar visited the Holy Mosque in Makkah where the General in charge of the security of the Holy Mosque itself hosted him, in person. Again, he was impressed by the extensive coverage of CCTV cameras monitored from the main control room. There was a unit dedicated to dealing with VIP visits, which he thought was good practice in view of the large number of VIP visits that are made to the Holy Mosque by both officials and politicians of Muslim countries across the world.

Later that afternoon, he visited the PSD Emergency Special Forces (ESF), who were temporarily based in Mina for the duration of the Hajj. The ESF appeared well equipped to deal with any terrorist type incidents, as was the Bomb Disposal team. He met the General in charge of the Civil Defence Department Headquarters, a facility with a large fleet of ambulances, fire-engines and heavy earth moving equipment and, after the floods last year,



a number of boats. The Civil Defence Department also had a fleet of three heavy lift helicopters used in the air ambulance role or for moving operational staff quickly.

ACC Akhtar was struck by the scale of the facility where animals are slaughtered as part of the ritual of performing Hajj. This operation is huge in scale as every person performing the Hajj (two and half to three million people every year) sacrifices an animal, which means a large number of animals being sacrificed. "In years gone by the meat from most of these animals would probably have gone to waste." he noted. "There are now modern facilities in four extremely large abattoirs where the meat is frozen and then distributed to the poor in various countries. The Public Security Department oversees this whole operation".

ACC Akhtar was also delighted to visit the Holy City of Madinah where he was given a tour of the holy sites, and to have the opportunity to perform Umrah in the Holy Mosque in Makkah. He was later flown over the plains of Mina and Arafat: "Whilst I had previously obtained an appreciation of the scale of the plains of Mina and Arafat and the tented city, which is built to accommodate the Hajjis during the three or four day period of Hajj, it was only when I flew over these areas that I was able to get a fuller appreciation of the scale of the operation that the Saudi authorities have to deal with".