

THE SECOND WORLD CONGRESS FOR
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

WOCMES-2

11-16 JUNE 2006

Organized by the
ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR INTER-FAITH STUDIES (RIIFS)

AMMAN - JORDAN

REPORT SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2007

1. What is WOCMES-2?

The World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) is a gathering of scholars, researchers, students and professionals drawn from a broad range of educational and other institutions, organizations and associations from around the world. What brings this global community together is a common interest in the study of the Middle East, North Africa and the Muslim states of Central Asia, in addition to those areas of the world directly or indirectly affected by developments in these regions.

WOCMES is intended to provide Middle Eastern specialists from all branches of the humanities and social sciences with the opportunity to meet and exchange research, experience and ideas, and to address - and attempt to reconcile - some of the challenges that arise when methodology meets theory and praxis meets politics. It involves numerous academic panels and roundtable discussions approved, in advance, by an academic committee, as well as keynote addresses by prominent scholars, scholarly exhibitions, and cultural and other events relevant to the field.

One of the principal long-term goals of WOCMES is to build and strengthen regional and global networks for joint research and the dissemination of findings and interpretations. Hence, it benefits scholars and academic institutions in the developing world by allowing them to gain international exposure and to make important and substantive contacts for future cooperative efforts. It also benefits those in the developed world by introducing them to little-known sources, local discourses and new perspectives on academic and regional developments.

As a major international academic congress, WOCMES also gives the far-flung members of various academic associations a place where they can meet and discuss organizational business in executive meetings and plenary sessions. Moreover, local and international media and high-ranking decision-makers involved in politics, economics and culture are able to attend many of the proceedings in order to acquaint themselves with new information, concepts and perspectives that can inform their respective endeavours.

The scholars and professionals who attend WOCMES are the opinion leaders who shape the way in which the region is presented and perceived in economic, political and academic fora. When crises arise in the region, they are the specialists who advise governments on policy, who inform international NGOs about cultural sensitivities, who provide context to global television audiences and who share their outlooks in articles published in influential newspapers and journals. At all times, they interpret the history and culture of the Middle East, sharing their insights and opinions with the reading public and with their students - the citizens, scholars and decision-makers of the future.

WOCMES-2 is the first major congress of Middle Eastern studies ever to take place in the Middle East - the field's actual focal point. This striking departure from previous practice is intended to further the WOCMES goal of strengthening regional and international scholarly networks in a very practical way. While individual scholars living in the Middle East have long been able to travel and interact with colleagues outside of the region, the institutions which they represent - and, perhaps most importantly, the students whom they teach - have seldom benefited from such close relations. WOCMES-2 has helped to remedy this situation, while encouraging new approaches to studying the Middle East which are appropriate to the twenty-first century.

The Jordanian venue has also permitted the circumvention of recent and troubling barriers to contacts between Middle Eastern and other scholars. It has provided an unusually large number of specialists from North Africa, the Middle East and Muslim Central Asia, as well as other parts of the developing world, with the opportunity to meet with each other and with colleagues based in Europe, North America and elsewhere - and vice versa. Scholarship only advances when existing lines of communication are reinforced and new ones created so that educators, students and others are fully conversant with established and emerging discourses.

In short, WOCMES-2 was a meeting place where scholars, researchers, students and professionals from around the world made contacts and exchanged ideas. It was a nexus of Middle Eastern scholarship which presents the latest in research, introduces exciting new sources and stimulates discussion and debate. It became a platform where distinguished speakers could share assessments of developments in their respective disciplines and honour a distinguished scholar with the WOCMES Award

for Outstanding Contributions to Middle Eastern Studies. It has also been a showcase for Middle Eastern learning and culture, featuring a book exhibition (Arabic/International) attended by book-sellers, publishers and authors; coordinated exhibitions of modern Arab art by Jordan's local galleries; a film festival with panel discussions; and an exciting musical program. Furthermore, it was an occasion for decision-makers and media from around the world to learn from one another and from their regional counterparts. Finally, it has been a gateway to the Arab, Islamic and Mediterranean worlds, giving participants an unprecedented opportunity to visit historical and contemporary sites related to their fields of interest in Jordan and in neighbouring countries during and after the congress.

Jordan's stability and security, its openness to new ideas and its reputation for religious and political tolerance make it one of the few places in the Middle East capable of hosting this event.

The President of WOCMES-2 is HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, who is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), the Amman-based organizer of the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies.

The Government of Jordan played a significant role in making this event possible. The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) is also grateful to the numerous institutions and individuals who have provided contributions and support.

A Word on WOCMES-1

Based upon an initiative by the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and organized by the University of Mainz, the First WOCMES was a joint congress of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies (EURAMES) and the German, British, French and Italian Middle Eastern studies associations (DAVO, BRISMES, AFEMAM and SeSaMO), as well as their equivalents elsewhere in Europe and the Arab and wider world. The guest speaker at the ceremony to mark the opening of WOCMES-1 was HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, the current President of WOCMES-2.

2. Opening Session of WOCMES-2 (11 June 2006)

In his address to the opening session of the assembled delegates to the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2) on June 11, 2006, His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Special Adviser and Personal Envoy of His Majesty the King, said on behalf of King Abdullah II that “True knowledge and understanding of Islam and of other religions and cultures is the key to world peace and happiness. True knowledge and understanding of science and of other disciplines is the key to world prosperity and development. We must, thus, focus like a laser upon truth and knowledge; we must make the pursuit of truth and knowledge our true pursuit. God says in the Holy Qur'an: ‘We raise in degrees whom We will, and above every possessor of knowledge there is one with more knowledge (Yusuf, 12:76).’

In these and other areas, expert knowledge helps our societies make informed, successful decisions about policy and resources. Such knowledge is empowering - and essential. This is one reason why, for Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries, education and research must be a strategic priority. Indeed, here in Jordan, building knowledge is a core part of our national reform agenda. Our initiatives include support for educational excellence, academic networking and public-private partnerships to increase access to technology and other resources. We have looked to the Jordanian academic community itself for leadership. We have also opened Jordan's doors to the global intellectual community.”

His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal, President of the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2), in his opening remarks, stated that, “At this critical moment in the history of the Middle East, the Second World Congress aims to build and strengthen regional and global networks for joint research. It seems to me that responsible, objective and clear scientific knowledge about the Middle East region is now more necessary than ever. We need new thinking on the old conflicts, and we need our international partners from academia and media to help us tackle our common issues.”

HRH Prince El Hasan said, “The purpose of WOCMES-2 is to draw on and extend that invaluable historical process of exchange within and between overlapping civilizations. It is in that context that we can speak once again of the cognate of Istishraq, that is, Ishraq, Illumination: the timeless wisdom of the East. In many ways Ishraq is to the East what Enlightenment is to the West. After all, scholars in this century are heir not only to the Enlightenment enterprise, but the many strands of knowledge that make up what we might call the ‘conversation of mankind.’”

Following HRH Prince El Hassan at the podium on the first day of WOCMES-2, the Head of the International Council of the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies, Dr. Gunter Meyer, praised the efforts that made the conference a success. He said that the World Congress comprehensively considers all of the issues facing the Middle East region, and that the Congress represents an opportunity for all participants to exchange views and knowledge. He said the presence of international participation in the congress confirms the obvious interest in the development of the concepts of dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding among the followers of different religions and different civilizations.

3. Activities of WOCMES-2

The Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2) was launched on the 11th of June 2006 and lasted for six days. The event was organized by the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) and involved the participation and contribution of over one thousand five hundred researchers and experts from various parts of the world. These individuals participated in about two hundred symposia, meetings, and lectures over a six-day period.

WOCMES-2 included activities that embraced a wide range of issues and topics, all very much linked to the Middle East, particularly with regard to the development of prospects for cooperation and mutual understanding among the followers of different religions and cultures. Participants also

reviewed the challenges facing the region in the political, cultural and economic arenas in order to propose appropriate solutions.

Held on the sidelines of the conference were academic and cultural activities that included round-table meetings among the participants within the framework of the exchange of cultures. In addition, an Arab and international book exhibition took place in conjunction with the conference and every evening featured cultural, folkloric and musical performances by musicians from the Arab world and from Europe.

WOCMES-2 also featured scientific and cultural lectures and specialized exhibitions designed to activate the process of communication and promote scientific and cultural exchanges between the peoples of the region and the outside world.

A film festival, including films on Palestine and Iraq, were shown during the conference. The festival was organized in cooperation with the French Cultural Centre and held jointly with the Franco-Arab Film Festival.

The Congress included a variety of workshops, conferences and roundtables on a variety of topics in the fields of political science, history, economics and sociology. Following are examples of the topics discussed:

- Islam, Muslims and contemporary Islam and the mechanisms of social life for Muslims.
- The political variables in the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Arab totalitarian regimes between reform and continuity.
- Islam, globalization and the question of identity and belonging as regards Palestinian refugees and those living in Israel.
- Political opposition in the Middle East and Iraq today.
- The role of the Ottoman Empire.
- Multilateral initiatives on the Middle East.
- Issues concerning the identity of the nation in the context of migration movements.
- The translation of the literature and culture of the Middle East.
- The interaction between theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages.

4. WOCMES-2 Special Meetings and Keynote Addresses

In his WOCMES-2 Presidential Address, entitled “**A Vision for the Future of the Middle East,**” HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal called for a search for mechanisms to prevent the erosion of our young people towards terrorism and extremism. He stressed the need to give the young people of the Middle East hope for the future before they are driven away by other alternatives.

The Prince pointed out that the frustration experienced by young people is not simply a Middle Eastern problem. Instead, he argues that “The rise of a lost generation is not just our problem; it affects the entire world.” He emphasized that, “70% of Arabs are under 35 years of age. We need to give them hope before they are swallowed up by dangerous alternatives.” These young people are in the front lines of international security, which refocused on the Arab and Islamic world after the events of September 11th. He said that dealing with extremism requires finding an international humanitarian agenda based on pluralism and acceptance of others. HRH referred to the leadership role of individuals and non-governmental organizations to promote a culture of acceptance of others.

HRH added that, “From the troubled shores of Gaza to the chaotic streets of Baghdad, the world’s media beams out negative and tragic images from this region almost every day. For many people, the Middle East is nothing but a crucible of trouble for the world, a place associated only with overpriced oil, intractable conflicts, and terrorism.”

Prince El Hassan confirmed that WOCMES-2 is an opportunity for the people of West Asia and North Africa to exchange views and build a new vision on the Middle East. He stated, “To talk sensibly about the future, we must of course start from a recognition of present realities. We do face profound problems, and yet this region’s potential for growth – not just in economic terms, but in *human* terms – has in many ways never been greater. So, the question is how we turn our predicament into a dynamic partnership for peace, co-operation and development.”

HRH continued to emphasize that “From a regional perspective, a fundamental issue is the existence of a military rather than a political paradigm. Both domestic and international affairs are seen in military terms, which logically lead to military solutions. Besides the dominance of the security apparatus, there is excessive military spending and arms imports, and the threat of WMD proliferation.” Regarding the region’s economy, HRH stated that, “problems include excessive state sector control, lack of meritocracy and over-reliance on oil and gas.” HRH recognized other regional issues when stating, “we have the mismanagement of the agriculture sector, desertification and disputes over water resources, while in the cross-border sphere we have migration and refugee issues, the demographic time-bomb, the brain drain, international terrorism, drug trafficking and crime.”

HRH called for stronger regional ties by stating, “West Asia will remain a crucial nexus at the heart of the world order....The Arab world should be seen as a continuum within a wider context including neighbours like Iran, Turkey and Israel, as well as South Asia, East Asia and Africa. Relations must develop not only on the basis of resources, but also the rich cultural heritage that we share...” He also expressed his vision of social and economic cooperation that must be based on international norms and regional interests.

HRH talked about democracy and pluralism, and said that the achievement of democracy in the region does not necessarily mean to emulate the Western countries. Instead, he argued that “The values of development and reform exist in every culture and tradition, so they need not be seen as threatening new ideas imposed from outside.”

After the opening ceremony marking the inauguration of WOCMES-2 (see p. 4 of this report for summaries), a series of keynote addresses were presented:

1. **“Middle East Studies in a Time of Trouble,”** by Richard W. Bulliet, Professor of Middle Eastern History, Columbia University, New York.
2. **“A Vision for the Future of the Middle East,”** by El Hassan bin Talal, WOCMES-2 President (see p. 6-7 for summary).
3. **“The Global Rise of Suicide Bombings: A Sociological Analysis,”** by Riaz Hassan, Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow and Emeritus Professor at Flinders University, Australia.

The special events and meetings that took place under the umbrella of WOCMES-2:

1. Organized by the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) and the European Institute for the Mediterranean (Anna-Lindh Foundation), a panel entitled **“Intercultural Dialogue Across the Mediterranean and the Launching Ceremony of the Mediterranean Yearbook Med. 2005,”** chaired by El Hassan bin Talal.
2. Hosted by Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd with a presentation of a recently released online archive, *Arab Israeli Relations 1917-1970: The Middle East Online Series One*.
3. Organized by the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Deutsche Orient Institut, a special panel entitled, **“European Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East.”**
4. Organized by Yousef Meri, Project Coordinator, **Great Tafsirs of the Qur’an Project**, Al al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Amman, a panel to explore the importance of this online resource for Qur’anic studies in the west and the Islamic world.
5. Organized by the University of Jordan, a special ceremony to award Professor Mohammed Abdul Haleem and honorary doctorate.

6. The inaugural meeting of the **Group for Research on the Architectural and Planning History of the Arab Middle East (GRAPHAME)**.

7. Organized by Birzeit University Institute of Law, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung-Regional Program Near East/Mediterranean and the Free University of Brussels, a series of six panels on “**Legal Reform in the Arab World.**”

8. Organized by UNESCO/UNIFEM, a panel on “**Women, Law and Judicial Decision-Making in the Middle East and North Africa.**”

9. Organized by Global Priorities (an interreligious campaign to change budget priorities), a three-day seminar entitled, “**Towards Promoting Child Survival in the Middle East and North Africa: A Consultation, Learning and Awareness Building Event.**”

10. Bridges-Josour and the Arab Foundation for Sustainable Development organized a consultation on “**Arab Civil Society, Functional Democracy, Global Governance and the Rise of Fundamentalism.**”

5. The WOCMES-2 Cultural Program

A wide variety of cultural events were featured during the six-day congress. In cooperation with the Instituto Cervantes in Amman, WOCMES-2 presented three concerts of **Andalusian music**. Three groups from Morocco, Spain and Aleppo, Syria were featured in this series.

The renowned Iraqi singer Hussein Al-Azami and his troupe presented an evening of **Iraqi Maqamat**. This performance was held in cooperation with Orfali Art Gallery, which also held a special exhibition of Iraqi art on the occasion of WOCMES-2.

Mrs Widad Kawar, a collector of Palestinian and Jordanian costumes, and Mrs Layla Pio, an expert on old oriental textiles, presented a lecture on **traditional costumes and textiles of Bilad al-Sham**. The lecture, entitled “Tradition in Costumes and Textiles in Bilad al-Sham,” was accompanied by an exhibition of textiles and models showing a selection of dresses and textiles from the periods discussed.

In a unique experiment, **70 Jordanian children from Jabal Al Nadeef in Amman presented their first photographic exhibition**. These children were given the freedom to express themselves and demonstrate their talents fully in the photographs. The exhibition was sponsored by the Arab Foundation for Sustainable Development, with support from the private sector.

A performance of “**Voices for Didgeridoo, Organ and Narrator**,” was presented in cooperation with the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne, Australia and the Australian Embassy in Amman. The concert consisted of musical works which brought together the established music of the European church and the didgeridoo, representing the Aboriginal music of Australia.

Participants at the Congress were invited for a tour of Amman art galleries, including Orfali gallery, displaying a collection of Iraqi contemporary art; Makan, exhibiting the works of a group of young Jordanian artists; and the Khalid Shoman Foundation – Darat al-Funun, which is housed in three traditional buildings of the 1920s, alongside the archaeological remains of a sixth-century Byzantine church.

A unique event took place within the framework of the WOCMES-2 cultural program. **The Fair Trade Jordan Souq** was especially organized for the congress participants during the two last days of the congress. Over 80 stalls, selling a wide range of products from handicrafts, such as jewellery, ceramics, art, books and clothes, to home-made foods and preserves. All the goods on display were made by small Jordanian producers and businesses. Fair Trade Jordan is a loose alliance of NGOs committed to environmental protection, social inclusion and gender equity.

6. The WOCMES Award

The International Council of the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies decided to recognize the renowned French social historian, Professor André Raymond, with the WOCMES Award for Outstanding Contribution to Middle Eastern Studies. Professor Raymond is considered by many as one of the most important scholars of the 20th century in the field of Ottoman Egypt. A special ceremony was held during which His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal delivered the award to Professor Raymond.