

Historic world religions body elects Muslim as its new chair

By staff writers

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At its recent biannual meeting, the Board of Trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions elected as its chair Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid. The new leader's term of office begins on 1 January 2010.

He succeeds the Rev Dr William E. Leshner, who has served as chair since 2003.

The organization traces its roots to the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions, which took place in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In 1993 the council organized and hosted the first modern Parliament of the World's Religions, also in Chicago. Subsequent Parliaments have been held in 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa; and in 2004 in Barcelona, Spain.

Abdul Malik Mujahid is an imam in the Chicago Muslim community and president of Sound Vision Foundation, which produces Radio Islam, America's only daily Muslim call-in talk show.

Dr Leshner said he considers Imam Mujahid "marvellously equipped" to serve as the board's highest elected officer. "He brings to the chair a deep commitment to his own faith tradition," he said. "The Imam has an understanding of how religion is a force in American society and also in societies throughout the world."

"Most older things are known to fade away, but the Parliament is a phenomenon that constantly reinvents itself," Imam Mujahid said. "We were ahead of our ourselves in Cape Town when we started engaging guiding institutions around the world on sustainability," Imam Mujahid said. "Now it's the talk of the town."

The organisation is preparing for the fourth modern Parliament to be held Dec. 3-9 in Melbourne, Australia. As part of the Parliament, an Indigenous assembly will convene Indigenous participants from around the world.

"As we deal with issues of poverty and climate change, we'll be nourishing all of our discourse with the perspective of Indigenous people - who happen to suffer the most from the excessive consumption that drives ruthless economic development," Imam Mujahid said.

"Little did we know, two or three years ago, that not only we would be focused on environmental issues and climate change, but that the whole world would be with the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference," Dr Leshner added.

Imam Mujahid is a former chair of the Council of Islamic Organisations of Greater Chicago, and has written extensively on religion, public policy and applied aspects of Islamic living.

Imam Mujahid has initiated a joint campaign between American Muslims and the National Organisation of Women to declare rape a war crime.

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