During the past few years the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC; www.oic-oci.org) has shifted its focus to addressing issues and affairs of Muslim societies in Africa; it has been particularly interested in the developments that have taken place in minority communities. After the OIC held its first conference that focused on the “Muslim Communities and Minorities in Africa” in Accra during January 2003, the organizing committee decided to organize a follow-up conference to give specific attention to those communities residing in the southern and eastern African (SEA) region. The conference was thus organized by the OIC in conjunction with the Islamic Council of Mozambique in the city of Maputo.

The opening ceremony took place on Wednesday afternoon, May 23, 2007. At this function, an OIC representative and a member from the Mozambique government delivered speeches. In the case of the latter, Mrs. Esperanca Machavele, the minister of justice, gave her welcoming address on behalf of the president. The Ministry of Justice oversees and secures the rights of the religious communities in Mozambique. In the absence of the OIC’s secretary-general, OIC’s Ambassador Atta al-Mannan Bakhit, who is also the OIC’s assistant secretary general for international cooperation and humanitarian affairs, spoke on behalf of the secretary general by reaffirming the special position that Muslim minority communities hold, for they “constitute a bridge for communication, dialogue and cooperation between the Muslim world and other cultures.” In addition to observing the official protocol, the mayor of Maputo also delivered a speech, and so

SOURCES

ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE’S SECOND CONFERENCE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AND MINORITIES IN AFRICA (MAY 23–25, 2007)

Muhammed Haron
(University of Botswana)
did the Islamic Conference Foreign Ministers’ representative, as well as a Mozambique Muslim Women member who conveyed her thoughts on behalf of her group.

The official proceedings were divided into two sessions per day; each session was further slotted into two sections. The first part focused on a specific theme, and the second covered country reports. In the first session, Dr. Hamdun Sulayman from Zanzibar University reflected on the “Socio-Economic Development of Muslim Communities and Minorities in SEA Countries,” and Dr. Americo Rafi Assan from Mozambique dwelled on “The Consequences of Major or Epidemic Diseases on the Economic Development of Muslim Communities and Minorities in the SEA Region.” Both papers addressed critical aspects, giving insight into the status of Muslims in the eastern and southern African region. After a brief question-and-answer session and a break, the conference discussed the first set of country reports from Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, and Mozambique. Despite the descriptive nature of the reports, each shared insightful information that has not been covered in published academic papers.

In the second session, the audience listened to a joint presentation by Dr. Khalid Awad and Dr. Tamim Faraj (Tanzania) on the “Education and Vocational Training of Muslim Communities in SEA Countries.” They gave particular attention to the challenges and opportunities that faced the communities in the region. Since Mr. Tahir Sitoto from South Africa’s University of KwaZulu Natal did not turn up, Dr. Ahmed Sengendo, who is the vice-chancellor of the Islamic University of Uganda and who was also chairperson for the session, used the opportunity to provide a good overview of Islamic education in Africa. This session was later followed by country reports from Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. Since Angola has seldom featured in reports and academic publications, it was refreshing to listen to Dr. Fatima Viergas, who works in the social welfare sector of the Angolan government and has demonstrated her interest in religious communities, report on the status of Muslims in that country. She was the only (non-Muslim) female country reporter at the conference.

In the first session of the final day, Mr. Mohamed Amra, the Durban-based World Assembly of Muslim Youth representative, shared his thoughts on “Developing a Networking System of Muslim Communities and Minorities in SEA Countries.” Amra’s main argument was the coordination and intensification of the existing networks, so that smoother operations and cooperation could take place on a regional basis. The reporters