

**25th Annual General Meeting Canberra Islamic Centre
Address by Zafar Ahmad President on 17th August 2019**

Salam Alaikum all,

Thank you for coming to today's AGM. I welcome all of you to this day which marks the 25th AGM since CIC was founded. I would like to spend this time reflecting and highlighting some of the key achievements and challenges that CIC has faced in past year, as well my own personal experiences as outgoing president.

One of the major milestones for CIC in the preceding year was the completion of the Sabah Al Ahmad Masjid and a Education Centre, which became fully operational in May 2018. With the substantial assistance and efforts of the ex Ambassador of Kuwait and our patron, His Excellency Najib Al Badar, this year we were able to secure a grant for the operating expenses of the Masjid from the Government of Kuwait to the tune of \$185k. We have expressed our hope to the Embassy that this will be an ongoing grant for the operation of the Masjid.

With the opening of the Masjid and completion of that project, we subsequently concentrated our efforts on the refurbishment of the CIC community facility so that the community can use it for private function and events. You will have noticed that the CIC main hall has been significantly refurbished. With new ceilings, walls and air conditioning installed in December last year, the hall is now in an excellent condition for community and commercial use. CIC has spent over \$300k on the refurbishment of the community hall, which we expect will be recouped over the coming years as more events and activities take place.

Indeed as a result of the refurbishments we noticed that there was an increased rental use of the hall for private functions and events over the past year. This Ramadan we had 5 Iftaars in the hall held by the Indian/Sri Lankan , Bangladeshi, Pakistani , Mediterranean communities and by UAE embassy. Each one of them contributed towards the hire of the facility at a subsidized rate and both the In-

dian and Bangladeshi communities donated about \$9000 to the centre out of their collection. I thank them for their generous contribution for this facility and hope this continues in future. The income generated from facility hire is around \$20000.00 this year compared to last FY of around \$9000.00 and it is expected to increase in future years to generate sufficient income to meet the ongoing expenses of the centre.

In other expenditure for the CIC we also completed a storage shed at the back of Masjid at a cost of around \$15000.00 that is storing extra carpets and other material not of immediate use. Some of the old carpets were donated to the Islamic School as well as to a local school for prayers and the remainder was utilised in the Masjid class room. The carpet sourced from Turkey needs to be disposed of as it is surplus to our needs.

Activities

I will now move on to talk about some of the significant activities and events that have taken place at CIC over the past year.

On Saturday 27 October 2018 we took part in the National Mosque Open day along with 30 other mosques around the country. We have participated in the open day in previous years and found it to be a great way to encourage dialogue and break down barriers between Muslims and the wider Australian community.

We also held a number of stimulating lectures and visits by Islamic and Academic scholars in the new Masjid and in this hall. Of note was the talk by Muslim Senator Mehreen Faruqi on 9 Feb 2019 where she spoke about how a representative and diverse political system can ensure an inclusive future for all Australians. We also had lectures by Amin Islahi, a renowned scholar from India, an important talk by Ms Amani Haydar, a Lawyer and Activist, regarding domestic violence, and a Q&A session with the Race Commissioner Mr Chin Tan on discrimination faced by Muslim communities in Australia. Mr Tan has invited me to be a member of the Project Advisory Board for "Sharing the stories of Australian Muslims: National

Consultations on hate, racism, islamophobia and social cohesion” to represent CIC. As I will not be in the Executive Committee of CIC this year I have asked it to be passed to the next President of CIC. We also had visits by two Indonesian delegations and by graduates from Foreign affairs as well as school visits during the year to the Sabah Al Ahmad Masjid and Islamic Education Centre.

As you can see we have held talks on a variety of topics and subjects outside of strict religious issues. I think it is important for CIC to facilitate discussion of all matters affecting our community, including domestic violence and discrimination, so as to educate the public and to enable effective pathways and solutions to resolving these problems. As I noted before, we expect the facility now will be regularly hired for private, cultural and commercial as well as for public events which will further engage and educate the community.

Unfortunately we have also held marked some more somber events at CIC as a result of recent terrorist attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka. The terrorist act on Al Noor Mosque Christchurch on 15th March 19 generated lot of sympathy from our local non-Muslim community and we had an outpouring of support in the aftermath. We received flowers, cards and had a vigil at our Masjid on 18th March which included speakers from Christian, Jewish and Hindu/Sikh communities as well as local politicians who came to share the grief of Muslim community. CIC also collected and sent \$2370.00 for the two mosque in Christchurch. In April 2019 we also held a vigil and condolence meeting for the victims of Sri Lankan terrorist attacks in CIC that was again attended by other faiths to condone these attacks on innocent civilians in a church in Sri Lanka.

We also had first Eid mela in the CIC courtyard and hopefully attendance at this event will grow next year. We had two Jama'ats for recent Eid Ul Adha as with the growing attendance and to provide sufficient parking inside CIC this may continue now on all Eid prayers.

The CIC community was further saddened by the passing of Sr Zuraida Shelmerdine on November on 9th November 18. Sr Shelmerdine had been serving CIC member since 1994 and a foundation

member who made significant contributions to the Executive and establishment of the CIC. CIC had a prayer session for Sr Shelmerdine on 16th November 2019. Indeed her presence and hard work for the community will surely will be missed very much.

In terms of religious activities we also had Etkaf in the Masjid for the last 10 days of Ramdaan for the spiritual uplift in the holy month. The Masjid has provided this facility for the last two Ramadans and with the recent furnishing of accommodation in the Masjid, people are more likely to come for Etkaf and make use of these amenities.

The Sunday School is running regularly and now with funding for teaching staff by Kuwait Government I suggest gifts be given to the voluntary teachers as a token of appreciation for their time and effort. I thank teachers and volunteers for giving their valuable time to impart valuable Islamic education and manners to the children.

In terms of operational and financial matters I note that the ANIL trusteeship have reported to EC and submitted an initial application to the ATO for the restoration of the DGR status for the donations to the library fund. Due to some comments by the ATO, the application needed to be resubmitted and we hope in the coming year it will be approved and the library will grow and will be used more extensively by marketing its resources by the trustees selected and the new EC.

We also collected fitra of about \$6535.00 during Ramdaan that was distributed to local and interstate and overseas charities. This year CIC contributed \$2000.00 to help local women who are helping distribute cooked food to the needy families. CIC also collected food and other items for refugees and handed it to the Red Cross. Collections on two Eids this year of over \$9000.00 (\$3710 Eid+\$5575 Eid Ul Adha) is an appreciation by the community that CIC is providing good services and facilities and worshippers are happy and willing to contribute towards their maintenance. Whatever the community pays either through donations, through rental or school fees is ploughed back into the facilities for its upkeep and maintenance. The money stays in the community and is not given to anyone for

their profit. All our activities like executive committee working, our income and expenditure accounts and our elections are transparent.

Some final comments I have regarding the improvement of CIC and opportunities going forward is to make more efforts to attract and retain young people in both the membership and EC of CIC. We need to somehow connect them to the community and encourage them to actively participate them in the functions and operations of CIC. An environment is required where they do not feel intimidated because of their age, gender, race, background, appearance and dress to present and discuss what matters to them as young Muslims. I note that we have attempted to also be more inclusive and diverse in our approach to the EC. The CIC constitution was amended this year to include at least two female in the Executive Committee. As no females were elected in the last AGM we selected two members to fulfill this constitutional requirement. Unfortunately one member resigned after few months in the role due to personal reasons only short-while ago. We hope this year AGM will select at least two but may be more female members.

Lastly I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped and supported me in my role as President this last year and as member of the EC. I have been in the EC of CIC for the last 24 years in one role or another. Despite some disagreements and heated arguments at times, I am proud of what we have achieved as a team in the last year and years before and I am proud to be part of our community and the facilities we have provided for all to use. I thank community for their continuous support to this centre and wish it continues in future. I am taking a break from active role in the affairs of CIC but shall be supporting whatever I could do or contribute as a member of CIC as long as I am here. I would also like to thank my family to bear with me for the last so many years to serve community and in building this facility for the use of future generations of Muslims.

I also seek forgiveness if I have hurt anyone inadvertently or otherwise with my words or actions in the past in the capacity of a member of CIC Executive.

I pray to Allah this centre grow and prosper in future and serve Muslim community and fellow Australians and convey the true message of Islam to live in peace and harmony in this country of ours.

Wasalam
Zafar Ahmad
President (1918-19)
Canberra Islamic Centre
August 17, 2019