

## MAS-ICNA Convention 2008: Are Muslim Americans Ready to Accept the Change?

*Continued from page 25*

Having converted to Islam a couple of years ago, Andries is very aware of the change that is needed to transform the perception of Muslims in society. She wishes that Muslims would be more approachable and more out in the open. "I swear, for the last two years, I've asked myself, 'why aren't Muslims seen in the community so much?' They are such nice and good people," Andries said. "But if I were to walk by any sister in a Hijab (headscarf) on the street, I guarantee you she won't have a smile on her face. What image does that tell non-Muslims?"

Andries attended the annual Muslim American Society "MAS" convention in association with the Islamic Circle of North America "ICNA" on Thanksgiving weekend at the Hilton Americas. This year's theme "A Time for Change" resonated throughout the many lectures and workshops, alerting the Muslim American community that things need to progress at some time, and that time is now.

"I think the Muslim community is one of the least understood communities," Harris County's Sheriff-Elect Adrian Garcia said in his speech Saturday. "And it is important for members of an executive leadership to understand its people."

Garcia, a Houston City Council member and soon-to-be Sheriff of Harris County, told his audience which ranged from students and toddlers to lawyers and politicians that his story was very similar to many at this convention. His family migrated to the United States from Mexico City, seeking a better life and more opportunity. On the road trip to the U.S., his father stopped the car and asked everyone to get out. "My father had us all kneel on the ground to make a prayer," he said. "We prayed to God and thanked him for the opportunity in front of us. We asked God to help us follow the rules of the country we were about to enter and to allow us to give back to their community for everything we would reap from it."

According to Garcia, Muslim Americans are in a similar position. They have come here from foreign lands, have reaped the benefits of the United States, and must now continue to give back to the community by being active citizens. One way, Garcia said, is by joining the sheriff department.

"Without representation from each community," Garcia said, "we won't be able to recognize and understand our similarities and differences." Former president of MAS National Dr. Souheil Ghannouchi agreed with Garcia, remarking that "it is about time for Muslims to become comfortable with their American identity." Ghannouchi explained that Muslims in America have been following the similar path of many other U.S. minorities. The Muslim minority, however, is a standstill. "Historically, the first thing other minorities did was isolate themselves to preserve their culture," Ghannouchi said. "But finally they would see the need to integrate into society in order to excel. The Jews,

the Mexicans and the Koreans have all integrated and excelled. It is now time for the Muslims to turn from isolation to integration. Muslims need to start uplifting themselves and start impacting others." According to Ghannouchi, America's fast paced advancing society has no room for a weak and unrepresented minority.

"As a minority in the U.S.," Islamic Society of Greater Houston's Treasurer Fayeze Ghwari said, "Muslims have to work together to achieve our mission and practice our religion."

Islamophobia is one of the negative repercussions Muslims have faced as a result of their self-imposed isolation.

"People hate that which they do not know," Ghannouchi said. "The best way to combat Islamophobia is through integration, outreach, education, civic engagement, community service, and the media."

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, a guest at the convention for the past three years, stressed the same points of civic engagement and applauded MAS, ICNA and the Muslim community in Houston for their commitments toward society at large. "I look forward to seeing Muslims engage more and more with the new administration," Jackson Lee said. "I hope that soon we will see more Muslim staff members in the new government and in the hallways of the Senate and Congress."

Lee presented a Congressional recognition certificate to MAS and ICNA, expressing her wish to see the Muslim community make a positive impact on the new direction that the new administration will be taking. Political engagement was not the only form of integration discussed at the convention. One African American convert to Islam, Abdullah Odoro, talked to the Muslim youth in a workshop Friday and showed them one alternative method of integration - poetry. He introduced two young Muslim men who had been expressing their conflicts, their passion, and their love for their faith through poetry. "These brothers have been using poetry to spread the religion of Islam," Odoro said. "Nowadays you have to utilize all the different mediums to get your message across."

These young men perform regularly in and around Houston to groups of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Using their words to try to break the imaginary barriers, the young men wish to educate their fellow Americans about Islam so that it might resonate well with them. Andries also proposed a unique way for Muslims to get their message out. She suggested to utilize an important tool in the community that has often been neglected - the growing population of converted American Muslims.

"The Muslim community needs to accept and use new Muslims," Andries said. "What better tool can you have than an American to relate to other Americans?" The new convert felt that the speakers at the MAS convention "were right on the money" about Muslims' need to change. Her only hope was that their wise words don't go by unheeded.

## Vote For Chris Bell: Asian American Democrats Of Texas

*Continued from page 25*

This Run-Off Election is going to be held on Tuesday - December 16th - 2008 with Early Voting till Friday - December 12th - 2008. More information with Syeda Kazim at syedaaa@gmail.com or visit <http://chrisbell.com/>

## Don't Miss This Opportunity Ladies: FREE Mammogram Screening At Shifa Clinic

*Continued from page 25*

Mammograms are scheduled by "Appointment Only" and require prior Doctor's orders (which can be received from Shifa Clinic). Without this doctor's orders, Mammogram Screening will not be performed. All women must have their Physician's (Ob-Gyn, Primary Care, Internist, or Nurse Practitioner) Name, Address and Phone Number when calling to register with Ms. Bao, program coordinator by calling (713) 292-1045 Ext 2254. Fax Registration Forms to Network of Strength, Attention Ms. Bao @ 713-292-1047.

For more information, please call 713-589-5710 or E-Mail [ShifaClinicHouston@GMail.Com](mailto:ShifaClinicHouston@GMail.Com)

## Islamic Home Financing & Re-Financing Seminars Come To Houston

*Continued from page 25*

Wed. - Dec. 24 - 2008 - 7pm. - Masjid Bilal - 11815 Adel Road - Houston - TX 77067

Thurs. - Dec. 25 - 2008 - 7pm. - ASIA Center - 618 Barringer Lane - Webster - TX 77598

Friday - Dec. 26 - 2008 - 7pm. - JAMA Masjid - 6550 Tarnef Drive - Houston - TX 77074.

## Your Participation In HPD Food Drive

*Continued from page 25*

(Phone: 281-850-4911) spearheaded the activities at the Fiesta located at 14315 Bellaire (@ SH 6).

Now at the Pepsi Plant located at 9300 La Porte Freeway, all the collected food will be packed and then distributed. Volunteers are needed for this purpose. Schedule is December 16, 17, 18, 2008 - 8am-3pm.: Packing at the Pepsi Plant at 9300 La Porte Freeway and Saturday, December 20, 2008: Distribution at the Pepsi Plant again at 9300 LaPorte Freeway.

Please call HPD Officer Muzaffar Siddiqui at Phone: 281-850-4911 and participate in this good happening around us.

This "Comida" Food Drive began in December 1985 with HPD Officer Joe Dominguez's concern for the less fortunate Hispanic citizens of Houston. Dominguez put together what is today one of the largest food drives in the City of Houston. During the first year, approximately 600 families received a Box of Non-Perishable food. The food drive now provides food for more than 3,500 families in the City of Houston.

## Never Misrepresent In Filing Any Paperwork & Never Give Interview to FBI Without Lawyer

*Continued from page 25*

Media Sponsor and Sam's Club and Tara Energy being the corporate sponsors.

Attorney Farah Ashraf diligently did the emcee for this program, which had four topics were covered, including "Immigration Issues Related To Small Businesses" by Attorney Ali Zakaria; "Civil & Criminal Liability for Small Companies: by Attorney John T. Floyd; "Launch & Grow of New Small Business" by Ms. Roberta A. Skebo - Director - Houston Center - University of Houston Small Business Development Center; and "How to Get Registered As A Minority-Based Enterprise in order to get Lucrative Governmental Contracts?" by Mr. Richard Huebner of the Houston Minority Business Council (HMBC).

Attorney Zakaria talked in details about the three Business Visas, namely E-2: Treaty Investor; H-1: Specialty Occupation; and L1: Intra-Company Transferee.

Attorney Floyd informed in ovations that his wife is from Pakistan and that he is proud to have five Pakistani children. He said in the wake of Mumbai Attacks, most likely FBI will conduct Voluntary Interviews of Pakistanis and it is very important not to talk to FGI agents without a lawyer (Attorney Floyd can help with that - 713-224-0101 - E-Mail: [jfloyd@johtfloyd.com](mailto:jfloyd@johtfloyd.com)).

Attorney Floyd said that many people in USA sometime fudge a little bit here and there in filling-out forms for mortgage, loans, immigration, etc.; previously this practice was

never investigated, but now for Muslims and Pakistanis, this is being closely done, as many people against whom Government has taken action after 9/11 had actually made minor fudging on their paperwork, which should in today's environment of prejudice against Muslims and Pakistanis, should never be done.

Ms. Skebo of University of Houston Small Business Development Center informed the 14 steps to be followed for successful business, which include being Customer Centric; having a sound Marketing Plan; hiring good Sales Persons; maintaining good paper trail of all transactions; etc. She informed about the excellent resources at the Houston Small Business Development Center, where FREE Counseling is available on all the aspects of running an enterprise; plus small businesses can organize Computer Training Classes; Tele-Meetings; Seminars and so on. For more information, one can visit their HQs located at 2302 Fannin, Suite 200, Houston, Texas 77002 (Ample FREE Parking); Phone: 713-752-8444; Fax: 713-756-1500; E-Mail: [SBDCMetro@UH.Edu](mailto:SBDCMetro@UH.Edu)

Mr. Huebner talked about the advantages of getting lucrative businesses with large corporations and governmental entities by registering through an easy process as a minority-based enterprise. For this, he asked everybody to visit <http://www.hmhc.org/>

For more information on PCC-USA, please contact Mr. Saeed Sheikh 281-948-1840 and/or Mr. Khalid Kazi 832-721-4444.

## Deadly Air Ambulance Crashes Hit Record In '08

HOUSTON: Medical helicopter crashes that have killed 28 people so far this year and made 2008 the deadliest on record for such accidents mostly occurred in flying conditions long known by the government to be dangerous, a newspaper reported Sunday.

Yet the risky air ambulance takeoffs continue without better evaluation measures or stricter flight rules supported for years by federal investigators, the Houston Chronicle found. Bad weather and night flights were common factors in the 65 fatal crashes investigated by the National Transportation and Safety Board since 1989, according to the newspaper.

Two of the deadly crashes that happened this year killed seven people in Texas. The two flights were at night, and both pilots faced reduced visibility. In October, the NTSB called Federal Aviation Administration progress on recommendations for tougher flight protocols and safety measures "unacceptable" and placed air ambulance safety on its priority list.

The FAA, which has regulatory power over the air ambulance industry, supports the enhanced safety recommendations but has yet to require them. "Rulemaking is often, literally, a yearslong process," said Les Dorr, an FAA spokesman. "We have a long

history of working with the industry to help them voluntarily improve safety and remain committed to getting these things into the cockpit as quickly as possible."

In February, three people aboard a medical helicopter on a flight from Harlingen to South Padre Island died after meeting strong winds and crashing into a bay. Four others in June died in a Huntsville crash that happened less than two hours after a different crew aborted the same mission because of low clouds.

Air ambulances have been credited with saving countless lives. Yet, each time the decision to dispatch one is made, operators face the critical task of balancing the welfare of the patient with the safety of the pilot and medical personnel.

Those pressures have been ratcheted up by the explosion of operators available to fly for any given call. The air ambulance ranks have swelled from some 100 nationally in the 1980s to more than 900, operated by hospitals and independent companies, industry groups say.

"There is a pressure for things to happen quickly when people are dying," said Gary Sizemore, a Florida-based pilot and spokesman for the National EMS Pilots Association. "But there also is a competitive pressure with the greater number of (helicopters) out there." —Agencies