

The role of the Cape Muslim Congress in the Muslim community

Quote: “The majority sees the obstacles; the few see the objectives; history records the successes of the latter, while oblivion is the reward of the former”.

Premise: The Muslim community needs to become more relevant and beneficial to the rest of the South African Society, particularly in Cape Town. As a century’s old and established community we need to move beyond Halaal food conflicts, Hajj Scams and Lunar related issues as our primary intellectual paradigm. We need to evaluate our immediate and long term value to the broader society, particularly the governing indigenous African. We also need to measure our inter-community interactions and not only the organizational relationships. However, before that process, we should evaluate our own immediate and long term value and requirements.

Motivation: Due to the continuous shifting political and economic landscape, as a minority community, we must secure our position. Our relationships and strategy for the future cannot be left entirely in the realm of optimism. As a community, we need to constructively plan to secure our future in South Africa.

To emphasize our current economic situation, Muslims like other Capetonians have and will continue to lose their work. With unemployment comes the difficulty to maintain a family, pay school fees and contribute towards community projects. In an Argus article, 15 Sept 2009 **“Economic pitch affecting Muslim charities”** Fouzia Van Der Fort writes about several welfare projects within the community that is struggling to feed and clothe the needy due to a decline in contributions.

Defining and prohibiting social crimes, is indispensable to the development of a wholesome and moral community. However, in this difficult economic period, more detailed and varied project initiation is required. The existing leadership capacity has been constrained, primarily due to the massive educational and social needs of the community. The Cape Muslim Congress acknowledges those organizations that operative within this framework as the community depends on the service that they provide.

The Cape Muslim Congress further recognizes the need for job creation to form part of its social responsibility. The CMC intends to assist with the development of a structured job creation program in collaboration with other organizations.

The historical disempowerment of the Muslim and other black communities

The Cape Muslim Congress recognizes that the gradual destruction of the local Muslim economy over the past 100 years was both deliberate and well planned. The devastation of economic racism exists today, as a reminder of what the Muslim community have been compelled to endure, so that “others may succeed”. Communities from Simons Town to Strand from Constantia to District Six all have similar stories. They were self-employed and self-sufficient. They fished, farmed, manufactured clothing and furniture, retailed and wholesaled goods. They built houses and transport wagons and contributed immensely to the development of a progressive and modern Cape Town.

Social problems were controlled as the community had an established social network that managed these challenges. The introduction of Apartheid Group areas destroyed the income streams by removing farmers like the Sadien and the Solomon families in Constantia from their land. Land which was inherited from earlier generations was immediately lost. Economically active and established families were removed from their markets and places of work. The existing social and economic networks that required generations to build simply buckled under the duress of separation. Fishing families like the Manuel and Anthony's were removed from their homes in Simons Town near the sea and relocated in Ocean View and Retreat.

Legislation and Poverty

Legislation was introduced to prohibit fisherman from fishing without a permit, while permits were mainly reserved for whites. Access to the sea was blocked by the development of harbors and railway lines which had restricted entry. Also, demarcated area for the launching of boats around the city was limited. Woodstock beach from where locals launched their boats was made inaccessible by a now defunct railway line. The subsistence economy of the fishing community of Woodstock and Salt River was eventually destroyed. In Simons Town the forced removal to Ocean View, away from the Ocean curtailed the development of that historic fishing community. Until today these groups have not fully recovered from the material and psychological displacement.

Building societies and banks introduced registration legislation, advancing the position of white contractors. Skilled Muslim artisans were relegated to the role of sub-contractors. Muslim contractors were given a tough time by professional societies who required regular fees upfront for certification. Regulation around the employment of African labor was harshly enforced as the permit system applied, making unskilled labor expensive. The strategy was to break the fortitude and capability of independent communities. This would guarantee the continued supremacy of whites. This strategy applied to many parts of community life, especially the ability to create economic activity.

Simultaneously massive clothing factories were established, employing mostly unskilled women. The availability of cheap garments caused many independent tailoring and clothing workshops to become unprofitable. The new working women also caused unforeseen problems. The forced removal created dormitory townships e.g. Mitchells Plain, forcing people to commute long hours.

Children required after care facilities as mothers were not available. Many men felt emasculated by the loss of their traditional artisanal trade. In displaced communities, social problems [alcohol and drug abuse] which had remained regulated became unmanageable.

The same factories which contributed to the demise of the traditional craft of tailoring and dress making are now closing down and relocating production to China for greater profitability. At present, thousands of workers continue to be retrenched, while millions of cheap Chinese garments flood the country. Workers with limited skills are now redundant as they have become unprofitable. The consequences of this massive layoffs and the destruction of income, in the name of profit, is being played out across the Cape Flats. People who need to live and feed their families are becoming desperate. This desperation has often led them to crime.

Mitchell's Plain and the Drug Trade

Between April 2008 and March 2009, **5705 people were arrested** in connection with the drug trade in Mitchells Plain. In 2010 another 6572 arrests and in 2011 the arrest level was 6260. According to the annual crime statistics, released by the National Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa, the Western Cape had the highest number of drug related arrests in the country, with Mitchell Plain topping the list. Similarly in 2010 there were 2069 reported burglaries and in 2011, 1938 cases were reported. Mitchells Plain also recorded the highest number of child abuse cases in the Cape. Sadly, Muslims living in Mitchells Plain are also subjected to this corruption. Many families are being torn apart as the drug dealers target vulnerable teenagers.

Communal economics in the Cape

Our current Mosque based economy which is limited to collecting contributions at the door, hosting Eat 'n Treats and cake sales is unsustainable. Traditionally, the Imam, Sheikh or Moulana is employed by the mosque committee. Salaries are drawn from collections, donations and fund raising. It is evident that many committees do not consider mosque activities, a business. Consequently they have no financial strategy, even though every mosque has income and expenses. Even the value of the mosque, as a structural entity is often disregarded.

Because of the job losses in our city, those who traditionally contribute towards the reserves of the mosque and other welfare institutions are less abled. These donors now have to assist members of their own family who are unemployed.

Getting started

An initial suggestion would include a **skills audit** of the unemployed. This would create a **skills base** from which individuals with specific skills could be identified. For example, a clothing factory manager could be, effectively utilized within a similar workplace if given the opportunity. The committed within the community, would be required to raise the capital necessary to establish a workroom where the manager and a few dedicated workers could manufacture quality garments e.g. pants, shirt or sweaters from basic materials.

The community via the existing mosque networks **must be encouraged** to support the efforts. To succeed, we would have created a quality product, a market, a potential profit but mainly new work opportunities. In this way the community, the mosque and the unemployed benefit. When successful within our own community, the concept could be applied to the rest of the communities as outreach, thus increasing our value to other less fortunate.

Remember: Our objective is not purely profit driven but moreover to restore dignity through work.

Furthermore, we must accept that jobs that ceased to exist are not going to return. The cost of production in China is cheap and we cannot compete. However, what we as a community, can regulate is our product quality, from whom we purchase, and to whom we sell. This form of collectivism has been the success of minority communities across the world. The Muslim population in Cape Town is estimated at one million. If 20 % are committed, we have a market of 200 000, who may require many different products.

As a Councillor I am prepared to assist any organisation that intends to develop our communities. By way of liaising at all levels of government, I intend to develop relationships with partners for the long term well- being of our community. If you are prepared to lead or assist with creating work, please contact:

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