

**WELCOME SPEECH BY DR. ABDULLAH
JIBRIL OYEKAN, MFR, AT THE OPENING
SESSION OF THE INAUGURAL SEMINAR
ON ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN
SOUTHWEST NIGERIA HOLDING AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, AKOKA
ON 25TH RABIU-THANNI, 1433AH(17TH
MARCH, 2012)**



Brother Chairman, Sir,

Distinguished Brothers and Sisters,

Assalamu ‘alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

Alhamdu lillahi ‘ala-s salaama wamarhaba bikum.

Allah be praised for your safe arrival. And you are most welcome. It gives me much joy and relief that you have responded positively to our invitation calling you to an important urgent duty in Allah’s cause. May Allah, SWT, accept your gesture as ‘ibadah and may He, Almighty, continue to strengthen your resolve and participation in the huge task of Islamization of Knowledge. The topic of this Seminar cannot be strange to most of us. Some of us here present are already involved in efforts on the topic, while others might have felt the need for it.

I am sure quite a few of us will recall the visit of Professor Umar Hasan Kasule of the IIIT, International Institute of Islamic Thought two Ramadans ago. Wherever he went, during that trip, he tried to bring to the notice of his audience, who were mostly academicians, the need for urgent action on proper Islamic handling of knowledge, the imparting of which most of us here claim as our profession. He was keen that the Muslim academia in South Western Nigeria, with which he was highly impressed, should be brought on board in the on-going efforts worldwide on the Islamization of Knowledge. It was as a result of that visit that the IIIT decided to sponsor a programme on the Islamization of Knowledge in the South West of Nigeria.

The IIIT has offices and affiliates in 25 countries spread over four continents. It was set up with the initial objective of reforming Muslim thought as a first necessary step in moving the Ummah from its current “lowest rung of the ladder” rating to the rightful Quranic position of **“You are the best Nation created for mankind..”**. IIIT Scholars have convincingly identified the prevalent education systems in Muslim lands as the “self-perpetuating core of the malaise befalling the Ummah.” The Institute has initiated many efforts in redressing the dismal state of affairs in the Ummah. Several International Conferences have been organised to address the issue and it has established a vibrant, highly intellectual journal, The American Journal for Islamic Social Sciences, which presents a global platform for those who are ready to contribute to the efforts aimed at Islamization of Knowledge, to articulate their thoughts and

findings. A few of us here are also aware of IIIT's efforts in the Northern part of Nigeria, on which Dr. Rafii Adebayo will elaborate later when he shares with us the experiences in the North, in sha' Allah. This Seminar can therefore be construed as the beginning of serious efforts to bring the South West of Nigeria on board the Islamization of Knowledge boat.

Islam, as we all know, covers every nook and cranny of human existence and sphere of activities while Knowledge is limitless. When the two words are brought to play together as in the phrase, Islamization of Knowledge, the vastness of what can be encompassed is in the realm of infinity! Can you imagine the vast areas of research that the topic throws up; the opportunities for writing new books and rewriting old ones in virtually all disciplines; the size of the readership to which the books are to be directed like teachers, parents, government officials apart from the students themselves?!

Just as in everything else, the Muslim's starting point is the Qur'an and the Sunnah, in concordance with Allah's directive; ***"O you who believe! do not put yourself before Allah and His messenger."*** The very first word of the Qur'an, *Iqra*, sets the tone and defines what is expected of man, that is, to acquire knowledge, and to do so ***"in the name of your Lord"*** Who ***"teaches man what he knows not."***

Such words of the Qur'an like ***"we have no knowledge except what you teach us"***

".....is Allah not the wisest of the Learned"

".....and they do not comprehend ought of His knowledge except by His will"

".....And we have given you of knowledge but very little."

all go to establish in the Believer's mind that Allah, ta'ala, is the origin of all knowledge, and He, SWT, bequeaths it as He, in His mercifulness, deems fit. Hence to exclude revelation from the sources of knowledge would constitute *kufur*. For the believer, revelation is the first port of call on any topic.

Ar-Rasul, SAW, also provided us with guidance on the matter of knowledge.

He reportedly said ***"The world and all it contains are accursed except the remembrance of Allah, and all that aids to it"***. The implication of this hadith in the context of knowledge is that whatever activity the Believer is engaged in vis-à-vis knowledge must involve remembrance of Allah, if it is not to be accursed!

In another hadith, Ar-Rasul, A.S.W, was reported as seeking refuge of Allah from.....***"knowledge that does not profit"***. This hadith implicitly categorises knowledge into profitable and non-profitable components. It also poses a challenge for us to sieve the grain from the chaff.

The exercise of Islamization must of necessity involve a thorough review of all currently available educational materials. Just as other ideologies always ensure that all the systems and institutions they operate reflect fully their ideological standpoint and world view-point, the efforts at Islamization must vividly convey Islamic criteria, values, ideals, systems, etc in

the end products. They must motivate their target subjects towards Islamic aspirations and highest level of excellence compatible with the Quranic declaration ***“You are the best Nation created for mankind.”***

If we roll back clock hands, we should find inspiration from what happened during the reign of the Abbasid Caliphs who were based in Baghdad, starting from Abu Ja’far Al-Mansur (183/754-204/775) culminating in the glorious years of Harun Al-Rashid (195/766-238/809), who ruled in Baghdad from 215/786-238/809 and Al-Ma’mun (242/813-262/833). The Muslims led their world during their reign and their success was particularly due to their personal patronage of learning and the spreading of knowledge.

These Caliphs spearheaded the efforts to acquire all available knowledge. There was no stone unturned as all available Greek, Syrian, Persian, Indian manuscripts were acquired with voracity. The first efforts were necessarily directed at translating the texts into Arabic, thereby popularising them. Available works on virtually all subjects, astronomy, mathematics, physics, medicine, geography, chemistry, natural history, were thereafter edited. They did not hesitate to approach any authority irrespective of their faith or creed in acquiring manuscripts.

Caliph Al-Ma’mun is said to have written to the King of Sicily asking for the entire contents of the Library of Sicily. The King obliged him with copies of the books in the library. Similarly approaches were made to the then Byzantine Emperor, whose response was also positive. They also ignored religious differences in engaging competent people like Thabit bin Qurrah, a Sabean and Hunain ibn Ishaq Al-Ibadi, a Christian, as translators,. It is also reported that Al-Ma’mun once used a hundred camels to transport handwritten books and manuscripts from Khurasan (Iran) to Baghdad.

Various institutions of learning were established, the most prominent of which was probably Bayt al Hikmah, built by Harun Al-Rasheed, but later expanded by Caliph Al-Ma’mun and renamed Dar al Hikmah (House of Wisdom). The most prominent scholars of the time, including al-Kindi, Al-Kwarazmi, Thabit ibn Qurrah, the Banu Musa Brothers, Ahmad and Al-Hasan, were engaged by the Caliph Al-Ma’mun at the Dar al Hikmah to join hands in the translation of masterpiece from all over the world as well as hold discourse and discussions on advancing the frontiers of knowledge. Even the Caliph used to join in their discussions. Knowledge was popularized all over Muslim land. Schools and universities began to spring up from Andalusia to Baghdad, to Central Asia where cities like Konya, Samarkand and Burkhara became centres of learning and letters.

After translating and digesting these earlier works, the Muslims Scholars of the golden era then began to advance the frontiers of knowledge in the various fields and the world was to benefit tremendously from their creativity. For example, they pioneered and developed trigonometry which revolutionized mathematical science by immensely simplifying mathematical calculations involved in astronomy.

How well we can do with a Darul Hikmah in the present time, where the best Muslim brains in the world would be assembled and commissioned to produce various curricula and textbooks

for particular disciplines! But then, where is the ruler today, who is the patron of knowledge and learning, who can compare with Caliph Harun Al-Rashid or his successor Al-Ma'mun? Maybe we are not trying hard enough to make our rulers aware of the needs of our time. But there is no doubting that the process of Islamization of Knowledge requires co-ordinated contributions from the best brains in the Muslim world today to succeed. Therefore, distinguished brothers and sisters, each one of us has to create his or her own little Darul Hikmah to contribute his little drop of water which together will aggregate into a mighty ocean. The efforts have to be concerted and coordinated to avoid any wasteful duplication. By the time we leave here, each and everyone of us should have a sense of mission to play a positive role in the joint effort at Islamization of Knowledge. Together we should be able to construct a Workplan and set out a programme of sustained efforts so that our gathering here does not reduce to a talk-shop.

I must take this opportunity to thank you all for answering our call. May Allah reward you handsomely and increase you and us in wisdom and dedication to His cause.

I must also express on behalf of all of us our appreciation to the IIIT for sponsoring this Seminar. May Allah grant the Institute and all involved in its activities success in all their endeavours.