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REFLECTIONS ON THE CALL TO ISLAM IN 
PRE-COLONIAL WEST AFRICA AND 
21ST CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICA 

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Introduction:

On the fifteenth day of May, 2004 at the Verulam Islamic Institute in Kwa-Zulu Natal, 75 representatives of the majority of Southern African Islamic Call organizations gathered together to discuss the state of the Da’wah¹ in the region and how to set a new course for the future. The atmosphere was electric and feelings of frustration and despair were coupled with the resolve of experienced field workers determined to find viable solutions to the perplexing dilemmas of the 21st century. After all, the tragic events of September 11th had set back Muslim-Christian relations hundreds of years. Even South Africa, with its anti-imperialist approach to governance, was being affected by the international “War on Terror”. Muslims were being stereotyped by a manufactured image of violence, intolerance and extremism. Middle Eastern Islamic relief agencies were being branded as terrorist support cells and even hungry orphans and helpless single mothers in Southern Africa had to be told that aid from the Muslim

¹ Da’wah is an invitation or a call. In the Islamic sense, it refers to the invitation to Islam.

213
world was suspended until the international security situation has improved.

Looking back at history, Muslim merchants from the Arabian Peninsula had developed a strong connection with the leading indigenous people of Zimbabwe, southeast central Africa and the east African coastal region for over 500 years. From the early presence of the Dutch settlers in the Western Cape in the 17th century, Muslims had made a powerful cultural impact on the local culture as slaves, political prisoners and humble artisans. The development of Afrikaans as a written and spoken language and the richness of Cape culture owed a great legacy to the Muslims who suffered and toiled through slavery, colonialism and Apartheid. Muslim indentured labourers and merchants had struggled long and hard to maintain their identity and the basics of their Islamic way of life. Despite this long history of silent resistance and social interaction, less than three percent of the population of South Africa had entered into the fold of Islam.

This paper intends to focus on trends of Islamization in Pre-Colonial West Africa and then review the results of the Verulam conference. It is hoped that parallels can be found in the experiences of the two encounters and more light can be shed on the importance of analyzing the process of religious interaction and lifestyle exchange.

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TRENDS OF ISLAMIZATION IN PRE-COLONIAL WEST AFRICA

After the initial Muslim conquests in North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam crossed the Sahara desert by way of Berber nomads who had trade centres on either side of the desert. Military expansion came about because of the victories of Islamic armies over the Byzantine Romans and the local authorities. Islam, as a way of life, spread independently of the conquests, because of trade, migration and the wandering of scholars and mystics.³ The Berbers had been in contact, for centuries, with the people of the West African savannah region that lie in between the desert and the gold mines of the south. Islamic teachings spread along the trade routes that penetrated the Sahara in the tenth century from Tripoli toward Fezzan and from the Sus region of Morocco to the South. By the eleventh century, powerful Islamic empires arose because of internal development and the flourishing trade in gold.⁴

Writing in 1068, the Andalusian geographer, Abu ‘Ubayd Al Bakri, recorded valuable information about three contemporary African Islamic empires: Takrur, Gao and Ghana. These three empires represent, not only the earliest organized Islamic expression in West Africa, but also, definite trends in the process of Islamization. They give us a real insight into the relationship between Muslims and their non-Muslim contemporaries as well as answering questions of allegiance to non-Muslims and the relationship of Islamic

teachings to former polytheistic beliefs. Even today questions concerning Islamic political involvement as minorities in non-Muslim society are still matters of great divergence among Muslim scholars.

The Empire of Takrur (The Uncompromising rule of Islam)

The empire of Takrur, centered along the Senegal River, became a Muslim state in the first half of the eleventh century. Its territory, today, makes up part of the Republic of Senegal and Mauritania. Takrur controlled the salt mines of Awil and was situated near the commercial centre of Awdaghust and the gold producing Bambuk region, thus making it an important terminus for the merchants of the Sahara and the gold producers to the south. It attracted Muslims scholars from North Africa and migrants from far and wide. 5 Al Bakri wrote in his Kitaab al Masaalik wa-‘l-mamaalik:

The Banu Gudaala whose territory touches the land of the Sudan, live at the farthest limit of the domains of Islam. From the border of their country to Sanghana, the nearest town of the land of the Sudan, is six days traveling. The city of Sanghana consists of two towns standing on either bank of the Nil (Senegal River). Its inhabitants reach the ocean. The town of Sanghana is close on the South-western side to that of Takrur, situated also on the Nil. The inhabitants are Sudanese ...who previously worshipped idols until Waarjaabi b. Raabis became their ruler. He embraced Islam, introduced among them Muslim religious law and

compelled them to observe it, thus opening their eyes to the truth. Waarjaabi died in the year 432 AH/ 1040-1 AD and the people of Takrur are Muslims today.⁶

In regards to the relationship between Muslim rulers and their non-Muslim subjects, the ruler of Takrur followed the position of the majority of mainstream scholars of Islam, an understanding that comes from the concept of Al-Muwaadaat. The Sunni orthodox position defined it as allegiance, love, respect, and clientage that necessitated that the believers establish the Dar-ul-Islam (the abode of peace) through Da’wah and Jihaad (struggling against evil). If they were not able to do so, they were commanded to make Hijra (migration) to an area that would allow them to live under the laws of Islam.⁷

The concept of the uncompromising rule of Islam was held by a number of leading African Muslim scholars in the succeeding centuries and became the leading trend of leadership in eighteenth and nineteenth century West Africa. In the fifteenth century, the Algerian scholar, Sheikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Kareem Al-Maghili conducted a missionary tour to the south, stopping at Air, Takedda, Kano, Katsina and Gao. He established Islamic centers of learning everywhere he stopped, and always interacted directly with the people. He encouraged the establishment of Islamic law (Sharee’ah) and government. On arriving in Kano, Sheikh ‘Abdul Kareem appointed an Imam for the

Friday prayers, a Qadi (judge) for legal matters, established Sharee'ah courts and personally advised the Ameer, Sarki Muhammad Rumfa. In addition to this, Al Maghili composed a treatise on the art of Islamic rule and the qualities of the ruler. The treatise known as Taj al-Deen fi maa Yajib 'ala Al-Mulook became a type of constitution for the institution of Ameer and the basis of an Islamic theocracy.

Sheikh 'Uthman Dan Fodio, leader of the nineteenth century Islamic revival movement of Hausaland also followed this trend and took an uncompromising stand against corrupt rulers and any deviation from Islamic law. He wrote a famous treatise known as Al-Amr bi Muwaalaat al- Mu'mineen wa al-Nahy 'an Muwaalat al-Kafireen (The Order to give allegiance and clientage to the Believers and the Prohibition of giving allegiance and clientage to the Unbelievers). This document was a confirmation of his Masaa'il Muhimmah Yahtaju ila Marifatuha Ahl-us-Sudan (1217/1802) and Bayaan Wujoob al-Hijra 'ala al-'Ihaad (1221/1806). His movement became so influential that they succeeded in controlling the whole of Hausaland and ruling it for almost one hundred years under Islamic Sharee'ah. His ideas and writings are still having a profound impact on West African Muslims today.

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8 "The Crown of Religion concerning the Obligation of Princes".
10 "Important Issues that the People of the Sudan need to be aware of".
11 "The Evidence of the Compulsory Nature of Migration on the Believers"
The State of Gao (The Symbiotic relationship between Islam and traditional religion)

The rulers of Gao appear to have become Muslim somewhere around 1000 AD. Al Bakri wrote, 
*The King of Gao is Muslim and the royal emblem Islamic, but “the common people worshipped idols as did the (other) Sudanese.”* 

In the renowned historical chronicle of West Africa, known as *Tarikh as-Sudan* and written by As-Sa’di in the 17th century, it is reported that Za-Kossoi, ruler of the Songhay in Kukiya, became Muslim in 1010 AD. Za-Kossoi transferred the capital of Songhay from Kukiya to Gao. Gao remained the capital until Askia Muhammad Toure I moved it to Tendirma. 

What distinguished the rule in Gao and Songhay from Takrur was the fact that the ruler was Muslim and surrounded himself with Muslim officials, yet the rituals of the royal court were still based on traditional customs and beliefs. These beliefs were based on ancestor worship and the presence of divinity in the natural world. The majority of the people of Gao were non-Muslims so Islamic practices were confined to the elite and used to cement relations with the international Muslim world. Islam made little progress over the centuries in Gao since later accounts of the area show that the majority of the city’s population in the thirteenth century were still followers of traditional religion. Even Ibn Battuta described Gao in 1352 AD as “a big city on the Nile (Niger), one of the best cities of the Blacks. There were only a few Muslims in a predominantly non-Muslim population.”

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12 N. Levtzion, *The History of Africa*, p. 64.
13 Peter Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*, p. 47.
14 Ibid., 48.
During the reign of Sunni Ali (1464-1492 AD), Gao was turned into the capital of a huge empire. Sunni Ali was described as a ruthless tyrant who persecuted Muslim scholars and continued to practice traditional religion. He probably believed that Islam was valuable for long distance trade and provided literacy and new avenues of knowledge, but the powers gained through the traditional knowledge of divination and magic were more vital for political stability and military success.  

Many rulers throughout the history of West Africa practiced the system of seeking the best of both Islam and traditional religion and trying to forge a symbiotic relationship between the two lifestyles. Even the renowned Sundiata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire, in his epic battle with the master magician of the Soso, Sumanguru, employed his own spells and traditional protections along with his prayers to Allah. He appealed to the spirits of the nation as well as the Creator in order to insure his victory.  

The Empire of Ghana: (Tolerance and Autonomy under non-Islamic Rule)  

The empire of Ancient Ghana was probably founded around the fifth century. At the peak of its power, it covered a vast area from the southern limits of the Sahara in the north to the Bambuk goldfields in the south, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west to end of the Niger River in the east. This would include much of the present countries of Mauritania, Senegal and Mali. The control of the largest gold fields in the region led to a huge influx of Muslim merchants and scholars.

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15 Ibid., p. 49.
Al Bakri described Ghana in the eleventh century as follows:
The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in one of which they assemble for the Friday prayer. These are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars. In the environs are wells with sweet water, from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables. The king’s town is six miles distant from this one and bears the name of Al-Ghaaba... The king has a palace and a number of domed dwellings, all surrounded with an enclosure like a city wall.\(^{17}\)

Concerning tolerance between religions, Al-Bakri wrote: In the king’s town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where the Muslims who arrive at his court pray. Around the king’s town are domed buildings, groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings. These woods are guarded and none may enter them and know what is there...The king’s interpreters, the official in charge of the treasury and the majority of his ministers are Muslims...The audience is announced by the beating of the drum which they call “dubaa”, made from a long hollow log. When the people who profess the same religion as the king approach him they fall on their knees and sprinkle dust on their heads, for this is their way of greeting him. As for the Muslims, they greet him only by clapping their hands.\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) N. Levzion, Corpus, p. 79-80.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p.80.
These accounts by Al-Bakrj reveal a high level of tolerance between the Muslims and their non-Muslim ruler. Muslims were allowed to live in their own town and establish the major outward practices of their religion. Even at the court itself, the King allowed the presence of a mosque where his Muslim courtiers could pray. This shows that the King had a deep understanding of the importance of Muslims establishing their Friday prayers in their settled locality and their daily prayers at their place of work. He also understood the principle of Tawheed (monotheism) in Islam, which prohibited Muslims from bowing down to graven images or people. At the same time, the Muslims did not attack the sorcerers or break the idols that sat in the guarded areas around the town. The King also trusted the Muslims with his wealth and security, as most of his Ministers were Muslims. He must have understood the importance of connecting his empire to the world of Islam that developed trading fraternities from Muslim merchants living throughout the world.

It appears from the early accounts that the Kings of Ghana accepted Islam near the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth century. This was probably due to the influence of the Muslims who played such an important role in their court and must have had a profound influence in their lives. Islam offered many material and spiritual incentives and connected Ghana with some of the most powerful rulers in the, then known world.19 In 1154

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19 Ghana was also highly influenced by Al-Muraritun (Almoravids) who under the leadership of Abdallah ibn Yasin spread Islam in the eleventh century Western Sudan. There is no solid evidence of a conquest as claimed by some historians. See: David Conrad and Humphrey Fisher, The Conquest that never was: Ghana and the Almoravids, 1076. HISTORY IN AFRICA, vol.9, (1982).
AD, Al-Shareef, Abu ʿAbdullah Muhammad Al-Idrisi completed his famous work, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaaq fi ikhtiraaq al-Aftaaq*, for the Christian king of Sicily, the Norman Roger II. He included in it a description of Ghana that described the wholesale acceptance of Islam within the empire. Al-Idrisi wrote:

*From the town of Malal to the town of Great Ghana is about twelve stages over dunes and deep sands where there is no water. Ghana consists of two towns on both banks of the river. This is the greatest of all the towns of the Sudan in respect of area, the most populous, and the most extensive in trade. Prosperous merchants go there from all the surrounding countries... Its people are Muslim, and its king, according to what is reported, belongs to the progeny of Salih ibn ʿAbdullah ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn ʿAli ibn Abi Talib. The khutbah is delivered in his name, though he pays allegiance to the ʿAbbasid caliph. He has a palace on the bank of the Nil (Niger), strongly built and perfectly fortified.*

This approach of toleration and mutual benefit enabled the Muslims in Ancient Ghana to transmit peacefully their message of monotheism and purity of relationships. Their uncompromising stand regarding the establishment of prayer and the autonomy of their lifestyle kept their message clear and protected them from deviation. Their involvement in the everyday affairs of the King and their critical role in the economy of the country must have given them an aura of quiet strength and importance. This methodology of peaceful integration and meaningful

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20 *"Th e Pleasure of he who longs to cross the Horizons".*

21 Ibid., p. 109-110.
participation proved to be much more effective than the style of compromise and syncretism adopted in Gao. There are many examples in the history of the West Africa where Muslim scholars and missionaries adopted this pragmatic, quietist approach and succeeded in having a profound effect on non-Muslim society. One of the most successful examples of this trend was the West African scholarly order called the Jakhanke.

The Jakhanke

In the early development of Islam in Hausaland, the seventeenth century chronicle, *Asl Al Wangariyin* revealed the entrance of a large Mande clerical party coming out of Mali on route to Makkah led by Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman Zagaite. Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman, had migrated together with the descendants of the tribes connected to his great grandfather. According to one tradition, there were 3,636 erudite scholars among his followers, in addition to the common people.22 His leadership and the time and place of his appearance, link him not only to the Mande heritage of migration and trade, but also to the Jakhanke clerical dispersions from their ancestral areas west of Hausaland.

The Jakhanke were a Serakhulle or Soninke people who acquired the Mande language and cultural patterns.23 They called themselves Ahl Diakha (Jagha'or Dia), the people of Diakha, the ancient town of Masina visited by Ibn Battuta in 1352 C.E.24 They did not distinguish themselves as

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a separate ethnic group, but they maintained a remarkable consistency as a clerical order. All of the widely dispersed Jakhanke communities looked to a common ancestor, al-Hajj Salim Suware, also known as M'bemba Laye Suware, an undoubtedly historic figure who lived around 1147-8 C.E. Al-Hajj Salim appears to have migrated westward from Diakha-Masina to Jafunu where he spent thirty years. While journeying, he was accompanied by numerous students, family members, clan members, sympathizers, and disciples. After their stay in Jafunu, the Jakhanke migrated to the west where they founded a clerical settlement, Diakha-Bambukh. From this settlement and others, highly developed Manding mercantile communities developed. These communities benefited from the lucrative gold trade of this region, and carried out Islamic missionary work alongside their trade.

The Jakhanke, in their own accounts, saw their community as a clerical corporation, occupied by al qira'a (diligence in learning), al harth (farming), and al safar (mobility and travel). They were never organized as actual commercial collective, but assigned members of their community to carry out their trade.

Al-Hajj Salim Suware was one of the main scholars who exercised a profound influence over the Jakhanke clerics by

26 Ibid., 56, 66.
27 Ibid., 58.
28 Lamin Sanneh, Jakhanke, 19.
not only establishing the physical base of education and community development, but also, laying down the principles of their traditions. Local Jakhanke sources tell us that he spent most of his life in peaceful, missionary tours, making the Pilgrimage to Makkah several times. These activities fell under the broad Jakhanke category of *al-Safar* and led to the establishment of new mosques, the upgrading of existing mosques, the founding of Jakhanke educational establishments, and the recruitment of students. Education was at the heart of the Jakhanke clerical enterprise, for the leading savants, in the tradition of Al-Hajj Salim, regularly conducted missionary tours and carried a large following along with them on their journey. These students were trained to carry on the Jakhanke legacy and teach the basics of Islamic learning. They also made up a large part of the work force that would enable the Jakhanke agricultural bases to support clerical activity.

In the tradition of al-Hajj Salim, the Jakhanke clerics took part in divination, special prayers (*Du'aa*), and healing. These activities, which would fall under *al-Qira'a*, had a profound influence on the West African Muslim and non-Muslim populations. From the time of the birth of a new child, the Jakhanke cleric was called upon by his host community to perform the naming ceremony. The words of the *Basmalah* or the *Kalima Shahada* were softly read

29 Ibid., 23. This was made by the Jakhanke, themselves, according to Sanneh.

30 Ibid., 19.

31 Ibid., 150 3.

32 In Arabic: *Aqeeqah.*
into the ears of the child and the cleric would spit into the ears of the newborn.\textsuperscript{33} It was believed that this \textit{Duaa}\textsuperscript{34} would give the child protection from the evil forces of the spirit world. Later, the Jakhanke cleric would be called on at many different points in the life of the community for varying degrees of protection. On special occasions such as \textit{Eid ul-Adha} (the festival of the sacrifice), the cleric would be called on to make special prayers. In times of drought or calamity, the cleric would lead the ruler and his people in \textit{Salat al-Istisqaa} (prayer for Divine intervention in the weather) or \textit{Salat al-Istikhaara} (the prayer of Divine choice in matters of the world).

Along with the various types of \textit{Duaa} known to the Orthodox Muslim world, the Jakhanke distinguished themselves with a type of spontaneous prayer that could include non-Muslims. This may have developed because of their prolonged presence among non-Muslims, and the fact that the daily five prayers of Islam and the Friday prayer were restricted to Muslims. The Jakhanke may have believed that performing private prayer was exclusionary to people of other traditions.

The Jakhanke's greatest legacy\textsuperscript{4} from al-Hajj Salim was his principled disavowal of jihad as an instrument of religious and political change. Al-Hajj Salim is reported to have preached to a wide spectrum of Believers and non-Believers during his travels. He emphasized the necessity of peaceful witness in the propagation of Islam, while

\textsuperscript{33}Sanneh, \textit{Jakhanke}, 187. \textit{Basmalah} is 'In the name of Allah', and the \textit{Kalima Shahada} is the testimony that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Duaa} is a form of prayer.
adamantly opposing the use of violence. This was a significant development for West African Islam and along with the necessity for neutrality that grew out of the Jakhanke's long distance traveling and business involvement, formed the basis of a spiritual, yet pragmatic quietest tradition. The Jakhanke deplored involvement in war or in secular political activity. They withdrew from the mainstream of the societies they encountered and concentrated on building "islands of Islamic thought and prayer".

Jakhanke neutrality did not detract from the tremendous effect that they had on the spread of Islam in this region. In fact, it was really a great asset. Military conquest, in most cases, would lead to hostility and bitterness and often become an impediment to the acceptance of a new faith. Jakhanke pacifism was fluid and non-confrontational but did not exclude them from aggressive Islamic preaching or resistance to un-Islamic practices.

The Jakhanke profoundly affected Hausa society without the use of the sword. Their experience with numerous cultures and environments enabled them to understand their hosts and lead them gradually into a state of Islam. Therefore, the Jakhanke clerics and those who followed their trend of pacifism and political neutrality should be seen as a primary factor in the early development of Islam in the West Africa and a living example of pragmatic Da'wah and non-aggressive transformation.

35Lamin Sanneh, Jakhanke, 21.
THE VERULAM CONFERENCE OF 2004

The meeting of Islamic activists and callers to Allah at the Verulam Islamic Institute in Kwa-Zulu Natal came at a crucial time in the development of Islam in Southern Africa. The Republic of South Africa, the leading economic power of the region, was calling for an African Renaissance yet battling unrest and disillusionment from the masses of its downtrodden people. Muslims were in a position to play a leading role in the rebirth of the nation and reverse the tarnished image of the international Muslim community if pragmatic thinking replaced emotionalism and stagnated theological debates. The discussion focused on the following points:

- A brief historical overview of Da’wah in the past three decades.
- The current status of Da’wah in the country.
- Current challenges facing Da’wah.
- The way forward.36

In summary, senior members of the conference traced the trends in Da’wah back to the humiliation of Egypt in the 1967 War. This major setback for Muslims in the Middle East caused serious introspection among active Muslims in Southern Africa. In the seventies and eighties, prominent Islamic thinkers like Maulana Fazlur Rahman Ansari of Pakistan, visited Southern Africa and shared their vision and practical experiences. Youth movements, relief agencies, Islamic educational centres and influential organizations

36 The minutes of the Verulam meeting can be found at the office of the Da’wah Coordinating Forum, Suite 215, IPCI Building, 124 Queen Street, Durban, 4001. For more information contact: DCF P.O. Box 49105, East End 4018 Durban, South Africa or 031-301-1641 or dcfi@telcomsa.net.
were formed because of the external influences from the Muslim world. Mr. Ahmed Deedat who began his counter-missionary work in the fifties, formed the Islamic Propagation Centre International in the seventies and influenced a generation of Muslim activists. He confronted the Christian ideological onslaught and developed strategies for the propagation of Islam to the masses of the African people. 

_Da’wah_ groups were formed that specialized in food distribution and basic Islamic teaching in the African townships. The Tablighi Jamaat of India and Pakistan had a major impact on the Muslims of the Southern region by sending their groups everywhere to call Muslims back to the mosque and inspire them to return to the fundamentals of their faith.

By the turn of the century, many local activists, even those who gave their ideologies an African perspective, were following international Islamic movements. Despite the positive achievements of these movements and the building of mosques, madrasahs and Islamic centres throughout the region, the main goal of reaching out to the broad public by the twenty first century had not been achieved.

The Verulam conference delegates pointed out a number of glaring deficiencies among the _Da’wah_ agencies and individuals involved in the Call to Allah. Among the major challenges were the following:

- A lack of knowledge of the Islam, itself, and the strategies for _Da’wah_ given in the main sources, namely the _Qur’an_ and the _Sunnah_.
- A lack of positive examples and role models for the young people and new Muslims to emulate.
• A lack of real commitment to the work of Da’wah.
• A lack of human and financial resources to support the work.
• The presence of racism in the thinking and actions of Muslims in general and Da’wah workers, in particular.
• Mismanagement of resources from both internal and external sources.
• The effects of poverty and economic injustice that still plague our land.
• The lack of coordination between the Da’wah agencies and Du’aat (callers).
• The absence of women in key positions of authority and decision-making.
• Lack of professionalism and the use of technology in Da’wah activities.
• Lack of relevancy in the approach to Da’wah.
• Lack of planning and vision for the future.

After two days of intense deliberation, the delegates identified a number of solutions to these challenges. Some of these solutions are as follows:

• The need for sincerity to Allah and positive thinking in the work of Da’wah.

• The need to drop personal agendas and organizational fanaticism in order to network with other Du’aat and Da’wah agencies. “Why does each person have re-invent the wheel?”

• The need to pool resources to achieve specific, well planned objectives.
• The necessity to equip the *Du’aat* with the proper knowledge of Islam and the skills to deliver the message in a modern context.
• The necessity in confronting racism and bias by understanding the roots of racism in all its forms and integrating the leadership.
• The necessity of involving Muslim women in front line leadership and education.
• The need to make an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Muslim communities of the Southern hemisphere.
• The need to send out specialised *Da’wah* caravans in order to train *Du’aat*, promote a high standard of *Da’wah* outreach and intensify public dialogue with the broader society.
• The importance of focussing on Islam in Africa as a means of dispelling myths of “Indian, Malay or Arab Islam”.
• The need to integrate African history and the role of Muslims in African life, in order to give African youth a better understanding of the universality of Islam. This could also assist in raising their self-esteem by providing role models from real historical personalities and events.
• The necessity of combining the theological call to Islam with upward mobility and self-improvement.
• The need to foster and support a forum that would not be another bureaucracy but merely a meeting place for *Du’aat* and a vehicle to network strengths and accomplish necessary goals.
The Verulam conference delegates felt that it was high time that Muslims resist being divided by labels like modernists, fundamentalists, secularists, and traditionalist. They believed that the time had come to focus on a common Islamic vision and work towards co-operation and coordination with individuals and organizations that are “hands on” in the field of Da’wah and social uplifting. It was, therefore, resolved to form a national body called The Da’wah Coordinating Forum (DCF) to serve as a vehicle for regional networking. Other Da’wah agencies and umbrella groups would be contacted to participate in this regional effort.

A Shura committee was chosen to take the responsibility for the day to day running of the DCF. This Shura was mandated to carry out the following activities:

- Establish an office, newsletter and infrastructure for the DCF.
- Send out Da’wah caravans to all nine provinces in South Africa and throughout the Southern African region.
- Assess the needs of Da’wah and identify the responsible people in the field.
- Set quality standards in Da’wah by introducing a non-offensive form of outreach to the non-Muslim public.

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37 Taken from the DCF pamphlet on the Da’wah Caravan of 2004-2005 AD.
38 The Da’wah caravan is a mobile group of scholars and Du’aat which coordinates with the local Muslim organizations and carries out a series of public lectures, training seminars and community sensitivity sessions.

233
• Set new trends in Da'wah by focusing on Islam in Africa and social uplifting as key issues for Da’wah offices and programs.

• Initiate a massive campaign of distribution of Islamic literature in the indigenous languages of Southern Africa

• Focus on some of the important areas of uplifting such as: adult literacy, skills development, HIV/AIDS prevention, life skills, and basic Islamic lifestyle.  

CONCLUSION

The Verulam meeting succeeded in adding a new dimension to the Call to Allah in Southern Africa. It was not the first consultative gathering of Muslim minds in this region, nor was the resolutions, for the most part, new ideas. What distinguished this gathering and the new national forum for Da’wah, was the broadness of its scope and the relevancy of its message. A Shura committee was elected which consisted of African and Indian Muslims, leaders from the Sufi and Salafi outlook on Islam, an African Muslim woman and a member of a conservative Muslim ‘Ulama body! All of the members of the council chose to overlook their cultural or ideological bias for the upliftment of the Call to Allah. The DCF since the first Verulam meeting succeeded in establishing a Shura office in Durban and sending out Da’wah caravans to all nine provinces in South Africa, as well as, Botswana, Malawi and Lesotho.

DCF Da’wah caravan pamphlet, p.2.
The Jakhanke of West Africa focused on education, farming, and missionary travel. Similarly, the DCF chose to focus on re-education of *Du'aat*, motivation of the Muslim community, skills development, adult literacy, HIV/AIDS awareness and *Da'wah* caravans to invite the public to Islam. In the pragmatic tradition of tolerance, the DCF chose to avoid involvement in local or national politics and the use of aggressive, violent means to prevent corruption and immorality. Through deeper research into the methodology of pre-colonial African Muslim leaders and more focus on the twenty-first century African Renaissance, Muslims of Southern Africa may be empowered to play a more decisive role in the Southern Hemisphere and enabled to make a more meaningful call to Islam.