

BIG STORY

big story

240 Filipinos embraced Islam last year

IAC has successfully helped around 1,500 new Muslims from 16 different nationalities to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of their new religion.

TDIManama
Muhannad Mansour

As many as 243 nationals of the Philippines embraced Islam last year while 50 convert every month on an average in the Kingdom, thanks to the efforts of a Bahraini centre specialised in the teaching of Islam, which recently expanded its Daawah (proselytising) activities to include social media networks and other digital platforms.

Islam Awareness Centre (IAC) was established in 1978 and began as an idea by a group of ambitious Bahraini youth back then, says Tariq Al Wazzan, the president of the centre.

After forty years, the IAC is today one of the most active Daawah centres in Bahrain and the region, as it organises numerous activities and conducts different programmes to suit the different expatriate communities living in the Kingdom.

While speaking to Tribune, Mr Al Wazzan elaborated more on the activities of the centre and how it successfully helped around 1,500 new Muslims from 16 different nationalities to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of their new religion.

Explaining the goals, vision and mission of IAC, Mr Al Wazzan said, "Our goal is to spread awareness of Islam to non-Muslims, caring for the needs of new Muslims, teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and educating expatriate Muslim communities. We always strive to achieve excellence in spreading awareness of Islam with wisdom and good teaching, using modern tools and in partnership with the other Islamic awareness organisations."

Growing numbers

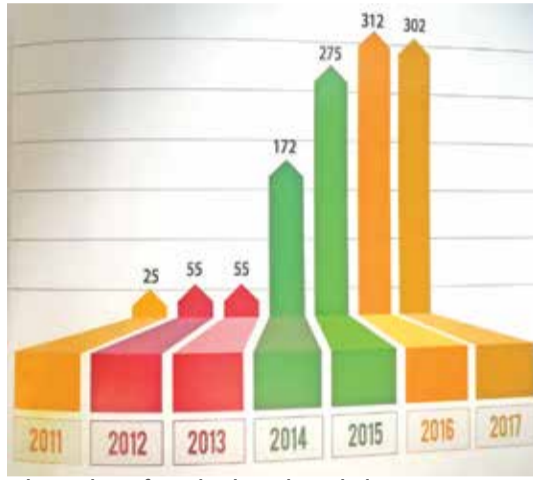
Mr Al Wazzan revealed that the numbers of people who converted to Islam have been steadily growing since the establishment of the centre, confirming that IAC helped 25 people to convert in 2011, while in 2016 a total of 312 individuals embraced Islam. "By the grace of Allah, this is a remarkable achievement for the centre and we look forward for more accomplishments," Mr Al Wazzan commented.

He also informed that the majority of the new Muslims at the centre were women, with more than 200 women joined Islam last year in comparison with around 100 men.

According to Mr Al Wazzan, most of the people who embraced Islam through the centre were Filipinos. He said, "The centre's annual statistics indicate that Filipinos have more tendency to join Islam than people from other nations. The latest figures showed that a total of 243 nationals of the Philippines from both genders converted to Islam in 2017. There were less than 20 individuals joining from each of the other nationalities, which included India, Sri



Filipino members are offered classes in Tagalog at the centre.



The numbers of people who embraced Islam at IAC noticeably grew in the past seven years



Our programmes aim to bring about a generation of new Muslims who have a sound knowledge and awareness of the Islamic faith.

MR AL WAZZAN

Lanka, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, the UK, Ireland, Portugal, Albania and more."

IAC provides its visitors and members with a variety of free Islamic books that are available in over 10 languages. Tribune visited the centre's library, which also includes a large screen to play documentaries in different languages to visitors and members.

Additionally, the centre grants non-Arab members the opportunity to enroll in free Arabic language classes that are supervised by well-known language specialists and educators.

Programmes

The centre organises a number of Daawah programmes and activities in public places throughout the year. This includes stands at public events such as the annual Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix and the National Day celebrations.

"For the 10th year running, and in cooperation with other Islamic awareness centres in Bahrain, the

Centre hosted an Islam awareness programme during the Formula 1 event at the Bahrain International Circuit. During the days of the race, an awareness stand was set up both at the Circuit and at Bab Al Bahrain (old market) in Manama, with the aim of raising awareness about Islam, correct the common misconceptions and offer authentic hospitality to visitors of this global event. Books, leaflets and complimentary gifts are distributed to visitors. By the grace of Allah, around 20 visitors embraced Islam from different nationalities through this activity," Mr Al Wazzan revealed.

"This project aims to connect directly with non-Muslim communities in a civil manner. Answers are provided to questions asked by visitors of different nationalities and an open channel is maintained between communities and the members of the centre," the president said, adding that "over 70 people have embraced Islam at these stands in 2017 and 60 in 2016".

He also said that the centre distributes complimentary material about Islam in different languages to non-Muslim communities in public places.

"A team of dedicated and knowledgeable members from the centre explains the basic principles of Islam to raise awareness about its message and also answers any questions or doubts on the religion. This is one of our most lively events in terms of interaction with non-Muslims," Mr Al Wazzan said while speaking about the public activities of the centre.

Another programme that targets new Muslims and members of the centre is the "Teach Me Islam" project, which is aimed at educating Muslims who newly embraced the religion.

Mr. Al Wazzan added, "This programme is focusing on teaching Islam to the 1,500 members that have embraced Islam at IAC. After declaring the Shahadah

(statement of faith), new Muslims are enrolled in classes on religious rulings, Qur'an recitation, the Arabic language, principles of Islamic sciences and other such courses."

"This phase that follows their entrance into Islam is of critical



Two women repeat Shahadah (statement of faith) after Mr. Al Wazzan and entering Islam

importance to a new Muslim, who requires the kind of support and direction that will allow him or her to be steadfast in faith. This project has been taking place since the establishment of the centre 40 years ago. It helps to bring about a generation of new Muslims who have a sound knowledge and awareness of their Islamic faith," he underlined.

Digitalising Daawah

At the centre, Tribune witnessed the workflow of the centre's staff members, which included online Daawah activities, such as communicating with individuals who are curious to know more about Islam through emails and social media networks.

Tribune met Faith Adviser Zeeshan Mehboob, who spends around 12 hours a day practising online Daawah, through Facebook, WhatsApp, emailing and other

digital communication methods. Mr Mehboob highlighted that many individuals are more comfortable to learn about Islam online instead of actual books or personal interaction.

He noted that "the Internet has become the main communication platform nowadays and it's easier to overcome the boundaries of anxiety or embarrassment for some people".

However, Mr Mehboob also underlined that different nations interact differently, mentioning that "some prefer interacting online, while others find more comfort in reading books and others in direct interaction".

"This depends on the social and cultural background of a person," he commented.

Mr Mehboob added that online Daawah activities and programmes are available at the centre for both genders, adding that the centre's page on Instagram and Facebook has around 20,000 followers.



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women embraced Islam last year compared to 100 men.