

First forum on the protection of holy places

> Brussels-Islamic Tourism
Photos by Al-Kufani

The first international gathering to protect the holy places, sponsored by the Kufa Academy, was held in the Belgian capital, Brussels, on the 14th of July 2007, at the Marriott Hotel Brussels. The forum was attended by a large number of politicians, academics and researchers, from Arab countries and Europe.

The Forum comes in critical political circumstances and a very sensitive situation in the Islamic holy cities because of the problems experienced in the Middle East region, such as occupation, terrorism and the exercise of the Salafi ideology. For example, there is the destruction of shrines and mosques in Iraq and changes to the identity of Jerusalem in Palestine.

The organizer, Dr. Muhammad Said Al-Touraihi, President of the Academy of Kufa, welcomed the guests and stressed the importance of the neutrality of holy cities away from politics and the establishment of an international commission to oversee the Islamic pilgrimage. The commission will have a pivotal role in the protection of other holy sites in the Islamic world, particularly Jerusalem and Najaf. Van Koningsveld, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Leiden, gave a lecture entitled "The Prophet's Room", which addressed the different positions of Muslims towards the tomb of Prophet Mohammad, such as seeking intercession by Sufis and the majority of Muslims, and the Salafs who reject such trends. He presented a brief historical summary of the Holy Tomb since the burial of the Prophet and its development. The lecture was accompanied by a slide show.

The guest of honour, Prince Hassan Bin Talal, Chairman of the Arab Thought Forum, presented an important paper, entitled "Moral Authority and the Holy Places". He emphasized the point of not allowing religion to be hijacked by politics, and that the moral authority of religion should be revived through recognizing what is common and respecting differences.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, he mentioned his efforts to develop the Iraqi Council of Religions for Peace. As for Jerusalem, he suggested making it an ideal model that can be applied to all other holy cities by realizing the "moral authority". Prince Hassan said that there "could not be a solution for the future of Jerusalem through resorting only to legal issues or political processes, I proposed a new religious council which includes representatives of the three Abrahamic religions as the best way to make progress on this issue."

The publisher and industrialist, Mr. Shakiry, presented a paper on "The Importance of Tourism Culture in the Holy Places," focusing on raising awareness of tourism, and using school tourism for this end. He also presented a project to establish "An academy of Islamic Tourism" to promote the culture and values of responsible world tourism in society.

Mr. Shakiry pointed out that shrines, sites of prophets, historic mosques and other holy places are tourism's raw material stemming



Mr. Shakiry

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from the beliefs of Muslims and are visited by millions of Muslims throughout the year.

Prince Hassan praised the role of ITM magazine in raising awareness of tourism and the role of Mr. Shakiry in his published articles and books. He expressed particular interest in Mr. Shakiry's article on "River Tourism", published in his book "Tourism Prospects", and said that this tourism ensures communication between nations.

For the rest of the speeches and papers presented, please logon to:

www.almaawsem.net ■



Some of the participants

جانب من الحضور