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One might conclude, then, that these NGOs have focused their work, first of all, on development and relief issues in Sub-Saharan Africa in the name of Jihad and the cause of converting more people to Islam. In this case, it should be noted that the term Jihad encompasses a wider range of meanings than just militant holy war. Its relevance to the subject of relief and development stems from its general meaning of "striving" or "struggling". According to this worldview, the *Zakat*—a duty every Muslim must pay—can be rightfully spent on some kinds of Jihad including: military preparedness or defense; propagation of Islam; payment of salaries to religious teachers and to others, who impart other knowledge on which the people's progress and prosperity depends; and, for bringing about improvements in matters of faith and state. In other words, *Zakat* can be used for Jihad in the military sense as well as for Jihad in the sense of propagating Islam and development.<sup>3</sup>

In Africa, therefore, Islamic community development projects go hand in hand with Da'wah and Islamization projects. The main reason for the Islamic NGOs growing involvement in development matters in Africa is their better ability to reach the rural poor population, than government agencies do. These same rural poor are also the main target for Da'wah and Islamization projects. The primary missionary feature of the Da'wah in Africa has been the training of Muslim teachers, leaders, imams, and legal experts, alongside building of mosques and of schools attached to them. Thus, since the 1970s, future imams and youth leaders have become increasingly involved with the Islamic NGOs after an initial training in Africa. Then, they have been sent by these NGOs for further education abroad in Islamic institutions, universities, and advanced seminaries. Hence, it is not surprising to find that the version of Islam that has been emphasized by these NGOs is Salafist or Wahhabist or other radical versions as propagated in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States.<sup>4</sup>

Saudi Arabia, as well as some Salafi elements in other Gulf States, managed through the finance of relief projects, to turn a marginal Islamic trend of Salafism of the Wahhabi school into a worldwide ideology, with a growing number of adherents and a spectrum of doctrines, from a reformist Salafism to radical militant global Jihad. In this sense, Africa, with its enormous social problems, is the most fertile greenhouse for relief projects on one hand, and their exploitation for political and ideological process of Islamization.

The aim of this paper is to show how this lubricated mechanism of Islamic NGOs dealing with development and relief issues on the one hand, and with Da'wah and conversion of non-Muslims on the other hand, has worked in sub-Saharan Africa. This is done by analyzing the strategy and activity of the Kuwait-based African Muslim Agency (AMA), which is one of the most active Islamic NGOs in the whole of the African continent, and probably the only Arab NGO whose activities have been exclusively devoted to sub-Saharan Africa.

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3. See on-line at: <http://www.islamlighthouse.com/admin/1sub/books/102enchbook.pdf>

4. See on-line at: <http://www.theology-centre.org/ianlinden.doc>;  
<http://www.islamlighthouse.com/admin/1sub/books/102enchbook.pdf>



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## **The African Muslim Agency's Strategy and Scope of Activity**

### **Strategy Outlines**

The African Muslim Agency (*Lajnat Muslimi Ifriqya*) is a Kuwaiti-based Islamic NGO, which was founded in 1981 as the Malawi Muslim Agency (*Lajnat Muslimi Malawi*), focusing its activity in Malawi. Later, when it expanded its scope of activity throughout sub-Saharan Africa, it changed its name to the African Muslim Agency, only to change its name again in 1999 to Direct Aid International (*Jami'ayyat al-'Awn al-Mubashir*). As for now, it is still called the African Muslim Agency and in some cases it is presented as a branch of the Direct Aid International. Whatever its name really is, it will be called throughout the article the African Muslim Agency, or AMA.

AMA has three general websites: <http://www.direct-aid.org>; <http://www.labaik-africa.org/index.php>; and the website of the AMA branch in the Republic of South Africa: <http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za>. Most of this paper is based on analysis of these websites, which thoroughly describe the aims, strategy, and all sorts of activities of AMA in sub-Saharan Africa.

The founder and head of the AMA is Abd al-Rahman Hamoud al-Sumait, who was born in Kuwait in 1947. He holds a bachelor degree from the University of Baghdad in medicine and a PhD from the Liverpool University in diseases of hot regions. He further studied in McGill University, where he completed his higher education. Since then, he has published many articles and scientific researches on medicinal topics. In addition, since his studies in the university, al-Sumait has been very active in relief issues. As such, he has been one of the founders of many medicinal and relief associations, amongst them: The Muslim Doctors Association in the U.S. and Canada in 1976; the branches of the Muslim Students' Association in Montreal in 1974–1976; and the Joint Kuwaiti Relief Committee in 1987. He has been also a founding member of the International Islamic Charitable Organization and the World Islamic Congress for Propagation and Relief, and has been a member of al-Najat Kuwaiti Relief Association and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Association. He has been also a member in the Islamic Propagation Organization's board of trustees in Sudan and in the Sciences and Technology University's board of trustees in Yemen, as well as head of the Education College's board of managers in Zanzibar and of the Shari'ah and Islamic Studies College's board of managers in Kenya. Al-Sumait won many prizes and honors for his activities, the highest of which were the World King Faisal Prize for the Service of Islam in 1996, as well as Hamdan bin Rashed Al Maktum Prize for Medicinal Sciences in 2006, for his role in medicine and relief activity.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, al-Sumait concentrated his activity mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. What drove him to do that was an AMA's ground research, which discovered that millions of Sub-Saharan African Muslims do not know much about Islam, and worse still, their children tend to convert to Christianity. Al-Sumait regarded the phenomenon of the conversion to Christianity as the greatest challenge confronting the Muslims in general and Africans in

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5. See on-line at: <http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/famous/2003/09/article01.shtml>;  
[http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B7](http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B7)



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particular. Thus, his main aim was to do his best to struggle against this conversion, especially by aiding the local population with relief projects, hoping that these might cause the local population to convert to Islam, and by propagation of “true Islam,” i.e., Salafism or Wahhabism, among the local population.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Sumait underlined the strategy that must be taken by AMA in its activity in Africa in an article titled "The Relief Propagation Organizations (Direct Aid International – African Muslim Agency)" ("*al-Mu'asasat al-Khayriyyah al-Da'wiyyah*": *Jam'iyyat al-'Awn al-Mubashir – Lajnat Muslimi Ifriqya*"), which appears in one of AMA's websites - <http://www.labaik-africa.org/index.php> in parts.<sup>7</sup> In the introduction, al-Sumait describes how in the early 1980s, when AMA began its relief and Da'wah work in Malawi, the relief work was limited to building some mosque, digging some wells, and giving some aid to the local population. Later on, when AMA widened its scope of activities to other countries in Africa, al-Sumait became aware of the challenges confronting the Muslims in Africa. He came then, to the conclusion that in order to strengthen the Islamic identity of the African Muslims and societies, the Da'wah needed here should be much more comprehensive than its literal meaning and should include first of all development projects—such as building schools, orphanages, center for women's training, computer centers—in order to raise their standard of living. These projects, in turn, will support the propagation of Islam in a specific area, "saving" its peoples from "entry into hell", if they happen to convert to Christianity. Therefore, AMA's Da'wah programs have targeted entire tribes and groups and not individuals.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Da'wah strategy in use has been different from area to area and thus, had to be adjusted to the special conditions prevailing among the Muslims or the local African tribes dwelling in specific areas. This strategy is based on three basic assumptions. In the African countries with Muslim majority the aim is to support and strengthen the Islamic religious life of these people. In African countries with Muslim minorities the aim of the Da'wah is the same, in addition to the provision of Islamic high school and academic education in those countries or abroad. Yet, in pagan or Christian African societies, the Da'wah strategy is somewhat different and its aim is to convert these people to Islam through launching relief and Da'wah projects.

Furthermore, another aim of AMA is to find certain African regions and countries—where Muslims are the majority and have solid communities—which, according to al-Sumait, have been subjected to foreign strategies aiming at weakening the Muslim population in order to convert it to Christianity as well as its subordination to foreign influence. One of these strategies is the instigation of civil wars, in which each party has a foreign ally. These civil wars have been prevalent throughout Africa. In order to resolve these conflicts and to strengthen the Muslims, AMA claims that the only solution is

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6. See on-line at: <http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/famous/2003/09/article01.shtml>

7. See full text in Arabic on PRISM website – [http://www.e-prism.org/images/lajnat\\_muslimi\\_ifriqya\\_-\\_al-Da3wah\\_-\\_2004.doc](http://www.e-prism.org/images/lajnat_muslimi_ifriqya_-_al-Da3wah_-_2004.doc)

8. See on-line too at: <http://www.direct-aid.org/about/>



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comprehensive development and regional cooperation, as well as a coordinated effort of the Islamic NGOs active in these regions.

This Da'wah strategy, which combines development and relief as well as Da'wah projects, is manifested in a booklet published by AMA titled "the Twenty Basic Principles for Understanding Islam". The first principle is the perfection of Islam. Islam is described as "a perfect, comprehensive system which encompasses all aspects of life. Consequently, it is a state, country and a nationality by itself, and contains all the necessary ingredients to govern the universe perfectly... It is a mission and an ideology as well as Jihad and an army...". It explains Jihad as an "exertion of efforts in the path of Allah". Means of Jihad include physical warfare and also "money, pen, and tongue".<sup>9</sup>

From the beginning, AMA has been aware of the importance of the written word in its Da'wah strategy. Hence, AMA has translated the Qur'an and many other Islamic religious books into the local African languages, in addition to French, English and Portuguese, which are formal languages of the countries in which it acts. In addition, since 1986, it has set up a lot of Islamic local radio and television broadcasting stations throughout the continent, in order to reach those people who are illiterates and, thus, cannot read the written word. In parallel, it has set up courses of reading and writing for the elders.<sup>10</sup>

In order to ensure the continuity of these Da'wah programs in the future, AMA has launched programs to qualify children to be the "future's propagators" of "true Islam." AMA has chosen orphans and children from various tribes, whom it qualifies in its centers, to teach in its schools, and makes them benefit from the services it provides the population. Moreover, these children have taken an active part in the Da'wah programs, hopefully to lead in the future their respective societies while the best among them will be qualified for teaching. This strategy is in practice nowadays in 32 African countries.

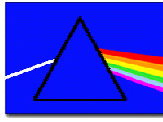
The Da'wah activity in Africa has been challenged by many difficulties, such as: the supremacy of the loyalty to the tribe to the loyalty to religion, which has served to stimulate civil wars and conflicts among the Muslims; the poor economic and social conditions of the African countries and, especially, of the African Muslims; the important role of the Sufi orders throughout Africa makes Islamic renovation a very difficult task and where these kinds of movements do exist in Africa, such as in northern Ghana, conflicts do arise between Sufis and their opponents; the aim of the Christian churches and its activities to convert all Africans to Christianity; the Francophone project of establishing the French language and culture in its former African colonies and thus, replacing the Islamic culture with it. And, yet, another serious challenge was a lack of funds. Most of the funds reach the AMA through contributions from Kuwaitis, Gulf States' citizens, the Kuwaiti and Saudi government and other people. But, it is not sufficient to cover all its projects as well as the wages of its workers.<sup>11</sup>

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9. See on-line at: <http://www.islamlighthouse.com/admin/1sub/books/102enchbook.pdf>

10. See on-line at: <http://www.almujtamaa-ag.com/Detail.asp?InSectionID=72&InNewsItemID=222169>

11. See on-line at: <http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/famous/2003/09/article02.shtml>; <http://www.al-jazirah.com.sa/2000jaz/jun/1/s/fr1.htm>



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### **Scope of Activity**

Despite all the difficulties and "despite the on-going starvation and famine, drought and hunger that is caused by civil strife, and natural calamities, there is a revival of Islamic learning and culture in the continent. One can say there is a dawn of Islamic Renaissance in Africa and it is obvious, as is very evident from its activities, that the Africa Muslims Agency is a pacesetter". Indeed, AMA is active today in 32 African countries and its scope of activity is huge, especially among the rural poor. According to the website of AMA's branch in the Republic of South Africa, "Dr. Al-Sumait spends ten months out of every year in rural Africa, and with his fulltime employed contingent of 3288 staff comprising of builders, contractors, architects, medical specialists, agriculturalists, teachers, administrators, Ulema, Da'wah workers and general field workers, the Agency is building and running schools, providing health care and clean water, and helping people find their own way out of hardships".<sup>12</sup>

According to the same website, until 2006, the AMA had achieved the following throughout Africa: building 840 schools and two colleges, in which a total of half a million African students study; awarding 300 scholarships/study grants to students for higher studies as well as sponsoring 1000 students for university studies; digging 4150 water wells throughout Africa and constructing three dams; erecting 45 medical camps, especially to cure eye diseases; establishing eight large agricultural, livestock poultry farms and 204 handicraft training centers for destitute women; dispatching 260,000 tons of food, medicine and clothing as aid to the needy during periods of severe famine, drought and floods; establishing 108 community centers, each of them comprising of a school, clinic, female training center, orphanage, and agricultural land; translating and printing 7.8 million value-based Islamic educational booklets/leaflets in 22 different languages; establishing an educational broadcasting station covering sixteen regions and ten languages and disseminating education programs in Africa; holding 650 training workshops for educators, trainee students and interns of education institutes throughout Africa; and sponsoring and maintaining 9500 orphans daily throughout the continent.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, AMA established specific community development projects throughout Africa, such as: vocational training carpentry workshop and center in Burkina Faso; agricultural and honey producing station for orphans in Uganda; cattle, livestock and chicken breeding farm in Zambia; women dressmaking and cooking center in Niger, maize producing and processing plant in Kaakieri –Uganda; industrial vocational training center in Wajjier/Kenya; women carpet making center in Wajjier/Kenya; Agricultural co-

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12. See on-line at:

[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=64](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=64);

and also at: <http://www.nashiri.net/content/view/3158/26/>

13. See on-line at:

[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=46](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=46);

<http://alwaei.com/topics/current/article.php?sdd=1444&issue=493>



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operatives operation in southern Sudan; rice and wheat agricultural co-operative in Chad; furniture making workshop for the handicapped in Togo; vocational skills training, orphanage and education center in South Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, AMA launched Da'wah, relief and development projects directed at specific tribes and societies—detailed in the above-mentioned article titled "The Relief Propagation Organizations"—such as: the Islamization of the Randili and Borana tribes in northern Kenya; the Islamization of the Giryama tribe in south-eastern Kenya; relief and Da'wah projects for the Pokomo and the Borana in eastern Kenya; a special project for the aid of the Somalis in east and north eastern Kenya; the Islamization of the Sakalava and Intimor tribes in Madagascar as from 1994; the Islamization of the Borana tribes in south Ethiopia as from 1997; relief and development projects for the Dinka tribes as well as for other tribes in Sudan as from the mid-1980s, for the purpose of pacifying the areas which they inhabit; relief, development and Da'wah projects for the pagan and Christian tribes in south Chad as from 1994, for the purpose of pacifying this region, which is known for its separatist tendencies; relief and development projects for the Dabula tribes in Senegal for the purpose of pacifying the southern region of the country; Da'wah projects for the Fulani tribes in Guinea, whose youth have been converted to Christianity; relief and development projects for the Muslims in north Ghana, Togo, and Benin, who suffer from economical and social neglect, as from the beginning of the 1990s.

Within these Da'wah projects, AMA ascribed a major importance to the spread of Islamic education among Africans. Hence, it established the College of Zanzibar in 1998. Among its faculties are the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the faculties of mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, and computer sciences. The students are drawn from Eastern African countries, the Republic of South Africa, Malawi, the Comoro Islands, Somalia, and Ethiopia, while the lecturers are drawn from Tanzania, Sudan, India, Egypt, and Algeria. In Somalia, the AMA established in 1999 the Somali Institute for Administrative Development, which trains Somali cadres in administration, accounting and computing.<sup>15</sup>

A few examples for the Da'wah activities of AMA directed at certain tribes are in order. A group of tribes such as this is the Borana, who is located in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The tribe's people have some similarities with the Muslims. For example, they call their sons Yahya, Ali, and Nur; they tend to fast in Ramadan; they prohibit eating pork; they bury their dead just like the Muslims do, etc. Yet, they are

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14. See on-line at:

[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=46](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=46);  
[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=64](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=64)

15. See on-line at: <http://www.zikr.mhost.ru/zikr/wnews.htm>; <http://www.labaik-africa.org/index.php?action=pages&id=11>



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pagans. So, while launching relief projects among these tribes, AMA launched also a Da'wah project in order to Islamize them. According to AMA, in the first year of this project it "built 18 mosques, trained 40 imams and propagators, sponsored 20 propagators, launched 16 Da'wah projects, taught seven Shari'ah courses, sponsored 50 orphans, sent 13 tribe's elders and leaders on pilgrimage to the holy places in the Hijaz, sponsored the studies of 40 students in high school, sponsored the studies of ten students in its college in Zanzibar, dug two wells, and began to build an Islamic center in the area". The result was "the conversion to Islam of about 50,000 of the tribe's people".<sup>16</sup>

Another group of tribes such as this is the Intimor in Madagascar, located in the south eastern part of the country. Like the Borana, this tribe has some similarities with the Muslims. Some of them live in a village called Mecca after their supposed place of origin, while others live in villages called Hijaz and Masri; they established a Ka`bah to which they make pilgrimage every year; and they prohibit the eating of pork. When al-Sumait reached this tribe in 1994, the Muslims comprised only 2% of the tribe's people, while the Christians comprised between 5-10% and the pagans between 85-88%. Since then, AMA launched Da'wah projects directed at this tribe specifically, which numbers about half a million people. These projects include: building mosques, schools; establishing Islamic centers and orphanages; translating Islamic books into the local language; sponsoring studies abroad; digging wells and so on. The aim of these projects is to convert to Islam 51% of the people of south eastern Madagascar by 2009, only one and a half years ahead [!]. Nowadays, as a result of this Da'wah project, many people from the Intimor tribe are Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

AMA has been very active in the Republic of South Africa since December 1991, when the Direct Aid International Trust was registered there. Since then, it has funded and constructed the al-Furqaan Orphanage and Vocational Skills Training Center in Finetown, south of Johannesburg. This huge complex comprises a mosque, a school, an orphanage complex, a vocational skills training center, a community center, a primary health care and medical facility, an empowerment bakery, and an agricultural training program. In addition, it has launched many relief and aid projects directed at communities of the rural and urban informal settlements as well as the destitute and the needy as a result of poverty or natural disasters, which have struck throughout the country. Furthermore, it has provided and facilitated adult male and female literacy classes to members of the Black community throughout the country.<sup>18</sup>

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16. See on-line at: <http://saaaid.net/Minute/m31.htm>; <http://www.mwaheb.net/vb/showthread.php?t=716>

17. See on-line at: <http://www.labaik-africa.org/index.php?action=pages&id=32>

18. See on-line at:  
[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=46](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=46);  
[http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=66](http://www.africamuslimsagency.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=66)



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In Niger, which is ranked by the UN as the second poorest nation in the world, AMA is also active, especially following the premature end of the rainy season and the big locust invasion that hit the country in 2004. As a result, the fields of sorghum and millet were decimated and the sparse pasture which the nomads rely on to feed their cattle disappeared, triggering a major food crisis affecting millions of people. AMA has organized an annual Free Eye Care Week. It has also bought and distributed food to the rural population, accompanied by active preaching. It has provided loans for traders and scholarships for students. Thousands of copies of the Qur'an have been distributed free of charge in primary schools and the headmasters have even been asked to encourage their pupils to attend Islamic classes on the days when they do not have to go to school. AMA, just like other Islamic NGOs active in the country, does not aid Christians. If Christians wish to receive help, they would have to convert to Islam. Thus, a number of Christians have converted to Islam. For example, two church officials went on pilgrimage to Mecca since they had been promised material help from Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

In Zimbabwe, only an estimated one percent of the population is Muslim, according to the International Religious Freedom Report from 2005. Yet, this number is expected to grow since AMA has had increased success in preaching the word of Islam among the majority Black indigenous population, in part because of its relief projects in rural areas, where the government has difficulty to reach. Some chiefs and elders in the rural areas have converted from Christianity to Islam.<sup>20</sup>

In Mozambique, Muslims number between 17.8% and 20% of the population, or around four million people, although some Muslim clerics claim that a much larger number of the population is Muslim. Whatever the truth is, Islam is growing in the country. Since 1989, when the socialist regime was toppled, Muslims have been able to preach freely and even build new mosques. This growth is mainly due to the intensive activity of AMA. An Islamic university has been set up in Nampula, with a branch in Inhambane.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of the AMA activities, dozens and even hundreds of people have converted to Islam in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Zambia (where it has been involved in building and running of schools, hospitals, orphanages and mosques), Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, the Central African Republic, Togo, Rwanda, Senegal, Ethiopia, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Malawi, and other African countries.<sup>22</sup>

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19. See on-line at: <http://www.islamlighthouse.com/admin/1sub/books/102enchbook.pdf>;  
<http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/showthread.php?t=6756>;  
<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=55584>; <http://www.labaik-africa.org/index.php?action=pages&id=34>

20. See on-line at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51503.htm>;  
<http://www.xignite.com/xWorldNews.aspx?articleid=AFP20070329364001>

21. See on-line at: [http://savage-comedy.com/\\_Islam\\_in\\_Mozambique](http://savage-comedy.com/_Islam_in_Mozambique)

22. <http://www.tebyan.net/index.aspx?pid=25330>;  
<http://www.times.co.zm/news/viewnews.cgi?category=10&id=1046462846>;  
<http://www.shohood.net/show.asp?NewID=75&PageID=7&PartID=1>;



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## Conclusion

Throughout its history, economic development has played a very important part in the spread of Islam. It has spread through business enterprises and trade, especially in Asia and Africa. The creation of economic communities brought great gain to the Muslims. Not only could they support themselves and their missionary enterprises, but also their economic success created an incentive for others to want to join them. Today, Islam is growing at an unprecedented rate through economic development by both Muslim governments and Islamic NGOs, particularly in Africa. The result is that Muslim communities are being strengthened and many non-Muslims are embracing Islam.

The 1990s and early years of the new millennium, have seen an increase in the number and reach of organizations committed to *Tabligh wa-Da'wah*, i.e., preaching the message of Islam internationally. Throughout Africa, for instance, Islamic organizations, including the World Muslim League (Saudi Arabia), the African Muslim Agency (Kuwait) and the World Islamic Call (Libya) have funded the education of local imams and *fuqahaa* (Muslim jurists) abroad and the activities of local madrassas, promoting radical Islamic currents such as Wahhabiyyah and Salafiyyah, which traditionally have had only little appeal in African societies. One significant consequence has been the emergence of a distinct cleavage in many African countries between "African Islam" and "Islam in Africa", i.e., between traditional local forms of Islamic practice and more radical currents promoted by organizations based in the Arab world.

This experience of studying abroad gave rise to a generation of African Muslim scholars with one common feature: greater fluency in Arabic. They have been considered as better learned by their communities than those traditional African Muslim scholars who did not study abroad. To some degree, they form a kind of a rival elite to the traditional Sufi leadership, which is characterized by speaking and reading Arabic.

Consequently, the growth of Islamic organizations in the national level has formed a theater for conflict between "Islam in Africa" and "African Islam". In many cases, this has resulted in rival national groupings. For instance, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress founded in 1928, was later on rivaled by the Supreme Islamic Council of Sierra Leone,

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<http://www.islamicnews.net/Document/ShowDoc01.asp?DocID=62928&TypeID=1&TabIndex=1;>  
<http://www.almansiun.com/index.php?pg=article&id=839;>  
<http://majdah.maktoob.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12059;>  
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<http://www.shawati.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-9834.html;>  
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The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM) Herzliya, ISRAEL

[www.e-prism.org](http://www.e-prism.org)

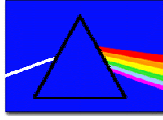
founded by scholars returning from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya in the 1970s and 1980s. In Ghana, the Salafi Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah refused to join the Supreme Muslim Council and put up its own "national" imam. Conflicts over funding the building of mosques form the root of many disputes with corresponding accusations and counter-accusations of embezzlement. Of course, much of this money has come from the Da'wah organizations.

However, it is mainly among urban educated Muslims that Islam forms a self-reflexive identity so that individuals see themselves as explicitly as Muslims set alongside or against other identities. For them, the concept of poverty quite easily forms part of a religious discourse involving feasible strategies for change. And it is from this sector of society that reformist and radical approaches to change from within a Muslim world-view will, and do, arise and from which leaders emerge. How these approaches are expressed will depend on what sort of Muslim identity is in play. The Salafi and Wahhabi variants offer solutions that spawn puritanical people unwilling to explore modernity in its Western form.

Another phenomenon that should draw attention, is the fast growth of "radical true Islam" in the southern African countries, where until the 1980s, Christianity was the dominant religion, if not the sole one, practiced by the indigenous population besides paganism of course. Since the 1980, AMA and other Islamic NGOs have been active in these countries. They have spread their version of Islam among the Black indigenous populations. As a result, many Black people convert to Islam even from Christianity, not only from Paganism.

With this in mind, if this trend is going to continue, Africa might be a Muslim continent, with a minority communities of Christians and pagans still at hand. Yet, much more serious and important scenario is that Africa might become a battle ground between the traditional Sufis and the more radical elements originating in the Arab world, as already happens in Ghana, Tanzania, and other countries. If the more radical elements win this struggle on the character of Islam in Africa, than it might comprise a real threat to world security and economy. Sub-Saharan Africans compose a growing share of immigrants to Europe, and might join North African Arab radicals there, either for the same socio-economic problems they face in Europe, or among higher educated Muslims, whose share in terrorism on European soil is about to grow.

The above-mentioned processes raise another element of tension in Africa, which is prominent for the time being in the on-going war in Darfur region in Sudan – the animosity between Arabs and African Muslims. The process of Islamization, even though by peaceful means, carries within it a process of Arab dominancy. Such a process is eminent in Somalia too, since its independence and belonging to the Arab league, and in part is one of the backgrounds of the chaos there. Similar tensions exist also in West Africa on the grounds of past memories of black slavery. The process of Islamization, especially that it is primarily done by wealthy Arab governments and NGOs, with a certain religious direction on one hand, and certain sense of superiority on the other, might bear negative results as well.



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The Islamic Da'wah carries within it lot of blessed and fruitful elements in the progress of African societies, as long as it is not exploited for promoting political extremist agendas. Reading the list of social, relief, educational, cultural, and economic activities of the Islamic NGOs in Africa, one might ask himself what is wrong? However, in the present conditions of the Muslim world, and with the challenges of radical and militant Islamist movements, which view Africa as a fertile field, some of the good will might lead to chaos, as an old saying: "the way to Hell is paved by good intentions."

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