



## **Sheikh Abdul Azim al-Afifi on jihad in the Australian context (summary)**

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013, National Imams Consultative Forum  
The University of Melbourne, Parkville Campus.

Professor Abdullah Saeed (NCEIS) invited Sheikh Abdul Azim al-Afifi (President of ANIC) to speak about the meaning of *jihad*.

Sheikh Abdul Azim began by acknowledging his fellow imams and inviting the audience to openly discuss and come to a consensus on this sensitive issue. He noted that the word has been frequently misused and misinterpreted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. However, there is a need, particularly among young people born in Australia, to provide a clearer understanding and solutions to their concerns.

Sheikh Abdul Azim reaffirmed the need to speak the same language to all, whether Muslims or non-Muslims; Muslims have nothing to hide. He further noted that many people discussing the issue have very limited knowledge, and are influenced by radical preachers. Meanwhile, the media, stirs up controversy in order to create news.

Sheikh Abdul Azim discussed the meaning of *jihad* as struggle, and questioned whether it only means physical fighting. He discussed the issue of defensive and offensive struggle – for example, to solve problems or prevent oppression overseas, just as Western democracies such as the United States do.

Sheikh Abdul Azim acknowledged that every person, Muslim or non-Muslim, wants to help the victims of conflict in Syria and bring the violence to an end, but going to fight there is not the right way to approach the issue. He pointed out that international stability is a common concern and that Jordan, for example – a Muslim country next to Syria – does not allow anyone to enter Syria, just as Australia has made it illegal for its citizens to go and fight there. Australians who travel to war zones thinking they can make a contribution are often traumatised and find it very difficult to re-integrate back into society on their return, if they do manage to return safely.

However, many things can be done to support oppressed communities in Syria and Palestine that are peaceful and will gain wide support. This includes organising together and seeking better political representation for our community, which is proportionally under-represented in parliament. In addition, it is possible to make representations to government on human rights issues such as Palestine, and



politicians will listen to good arguments and act accordingly, as shown by Australia's recent abstention in the United Nations Security Council voting on Israel.

Professor Saeed thanked Sheikh Abdul Azim for a very practical discussion that helped to contextualise some of the theological arguments.

The presentation was followed by an open discussion session regarding *jihad* and current issues, particularly the conflict in Syria and issues affecting Australian youth. The imams noted the need to use a variety of approaches to prevent young people from getting drawn into violence, which might include youth activities, sports, and social events, as well as the more traditional lectures and classes. Imams also noted the need to be in continuous contact with political representatives on issues affecting the community. Overall, imams stressed the need for calm and wisdom in handling potentially explosive and emotional issues.