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ISLAMIC CENTRE

# THE MUSLIM SOCIETY OF TORONTO INC.

P.O. Box 42, Postal Stn. "D", Toronto 9, Ontario, Canada

Dear sisters and brothers in Islam,

Bedri Bylykbashi, our president, asked me to give a short history of the Society.

As you know Today we are Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Founding of the Muslim Society of Toronto, Inc.

In 1952 the Albanian Muslim Society was founded by Mr. Regep Assim, Mr. Neim Sali and Sami Kerim. This group celebrated the major Islamic Festivals in rented halls, but there was no regular prayer hall.

In 1957 the Muslim Community was altered considerably in its national character. Mr. Assim's dream was to have an organization with Muslims from all over the world, who had emmigrated to Toronto, to meet as a family of Muslims.

A new organization was founded, with a charter from the Province of Ontario. This was "The Muslim Society of Toronto, Inc." The founding directors were Mr. Assim (better known as Efendi), Mr. Sami Kerim and Mr. Zakria Malik from Pakistan. From it's incorporation Mr. Assim was the President of the Society, Mr. Sami Kerim the treasurer and Mr. Hasan Karachi, a <sup>BOSNIAN</sup> ~~YUGOSLAVIAN~~ from Yugoslavia, was the secretary in 1958.

By 1960 these original officers were sadly reduced by the death of Sami Kerim and the return home of Mr. Malik. Mr. S. Hasan, a student from Pakistan, and Mr. Ameen King Ganam, of Arab origin became Directors And secretary and treasurer respectfully.

In 1961 Mr. Assim, Mr. Hasan, Mr. Karachi and Mr. Ganam were the principal officers of the Society when a building at 3047 Dundas St. W. was purchase with a down payment of \$10,000.00, raised by campaigns among the growing multi-national Muslim community. Until the purchase of the store on Dundas St. there had been no prayer hall, and Bajram celebrations had been held at locations such as the Club Kingsway, on Riverside Drive, owned by Mr. Seitali Kerim, brother of the late Sami Kerim.

The first prayers were said on 1 or 2 clean sheets on the floor of the front room at the newly occupied Islamic Center. Later talks and



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discussions were begun on Sunday afternoons, following the noon prayer in congregation.

In time the room at the back became a proper prayer room, rugs were sent from Pakistan by a former devout member, paint was donated by Mr. Karachi and the members painted the building inside and out, Islamic illuminations were framed and used to decorate the walls, etc., etc. In 1961 the secretary Mr. Hasan returned to Pakistan and Mr. Murry Hogben became the secretary, for many years. Mr. Hogben's in-laws, the Raufs were very active at the Xhami, as were the families of Mr. Ayube Ally and Dr. and Mrs. Unus Omarali.

In 1966 Dr. Mirza Baig, a member of the staff of the Department of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto became president. Mr. Assim had retired to the position of lifetime Honorary President, however he remained very active at the Xhami and in the Albanian Community for the rest of his life. Efendi obtained a licence to act as an IMAM and officiated at many, many weddings and funerals. Many couples here today were united in matrimony by Regep Efendi.

In 1966 Mr. Seitali Kerim became Vice-President, and I helped him as the secretary, doing a great deal of typing.

The number of Muslims emigrating to Toronto grew by leaps and bounds, and we soon outgrew our Xhami on Dundas St. and under <sup>the</sup> leadership of Seitali Kerim funds were raised, we sold our building on Dundas st. and bought a Presbyterian church at 56 Boustead Ave.

On February 26, 1969, after extensive renovations, the official opening of the Jami Mosque took place.

We had 100's of members, however it soon became evident that although we were all Muslims, the local customs of the different nationalities were interfering with our religious practices.

After a great deal of hardship we sold our interest in the Jami Mosque and bought our present building on Annette Street. The first floor of the building, under Seitali Kerims supervision, was gutted, steel beams were installed and the prayer room was constructed.



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After many years the two bedroom apartment on the second floor was gutted and the new meeting room completed.

After Seitali Kerim passed away in 1980, Mr. Rizvan Banka became president. Rizvans family and in-laws were active at the Jami for years. After 3 years the chair was occupied by Ibrahim Kulla, who also contributed a great deal with his brothers, and after a few years he was succeeded by Bedri Bylykbashi. *From 1981 to 2004*

Under Bedri's leadership an Albanian Muslim graveyard was established at Glendale Memorial Gardens, where a great number of former members are buried, especially in the section known as the Good Shepherd.

After years of needing a religious leader we were able to acquire the services of our present Imam Abdylvehab Hoxha.

This past year, as most of you know, the basement was renovated by Bashkim Bylykbashi's Company and we now have the facilities for our members to bury their family members according to Muslim traditions.

The Muslim womens organization began on Dundas Street. Countless dinners were cooked, bake sales held, children taught, childrens Bajram parties given, food contributed over and over, helping in every way possible to keep the Muslim community and their children thriving.

For years Mrs. Kibe Sali has been our president, we owe her and all the other women of our community a great deal - we could not have thrived without their whole hearted co-operation for over 40 years.

As you can see a great deal has happened in the last 40 years, as recorded in our minute books and newsletters.

Toronto, a truly multicultural city, is now the home of thousands of Muslims with 13 Mosques for many nationalities.

I'm sure our founders could not have envisioned the changes and the progress the Muslim Society of Toronto, Inc. has achieved over the years. After many serious setbacks, with Allah's help, I'm sure we are in a strong position to weather any problems that may occur in the future, Inshallah.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Mary Kabe Kerim*  
Mrs. S. B. Kerim