

LINE leaf

Newsletter of the London Islamic Network for the Environment

Awareness ■ Reflection ■ Action

Little Muslim Villages vs Big Bucks Project



Thai Muslims Protest

Photo Credit: Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability

CONTENTS

	Page
Little Muslim Villages vs Big Bucks Project	1
To China, But How?	2
Monthly Forums	2
Web Stuff	2
Nature and Us: The Teacher and the Student	3
Nature: A Poem	3
Recent Activities	3
Upcoming Events & Projects	4
Receive Email Updates	4
Would You Like to Support Us?	4

And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, "Build yourself houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct". (Qur'an 16:68)

■ Rattana Panklin & Ida Aroonwong

In June 2004, Bangkok locals were amazed, if not frightened, to see hundreds of men and women wearing red t-shirts and holding red flags, rallying on a business street in the capital. Simultaneously police were guarding the whole area.

It was clear from their dress that the protesters were Muslim. Having already struggled for twelve years against a Thai-Malaysia Gas Pipeline Project that included construction in their villages in Chana district, they had travelled one thousand kilometers in order to demonstrate in Bangkok. The project they were resisting included plans to build the biggest gas separation plant in Thailand. This was a threat to both the delicate ecosystems that supported the livelihood of the local fishermen, and to the way of life of the locals. The name of the project developer was the Trans Thai-Malaysia Co. (TTM), and the project was a joint venture between two state-owned fossil-fuel companies, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) and Petronas of Malaysia.

The rules of the loan

With Barclays about to provide a huge loan for the controversial development, the Muslim protesters wanted to petition Barclays' representatives in Bangkok. Indeed, the project was in breach of the Constitution and Thai environmental laws. It was also associated with human rights abuses that had taken place against villagers, protesters and NGO staff. The Thai government's decision to proceed with the project was made without public participation and had ignored dissenting voices from the public, hundreds of academics, and the National Human Rights Commission. There was also a senate resolution that the project be reconsidered.

Despite the above, two weeks after the demonstration, Barclays Capital agreed to be the lead financier of the multi-million dollar project.

More recent cause for outrage

In 2006, the government issued a decree, withdrawing the public status of land in the area of the plant. This took place in spite of a submission of an affidavit signed by many villagers, which insisted public use of the land. The decree was pushed through by means of a clandestine process that was in breach of the law.

What made the situation even more devastating for the Muslims was that this land was *wakaf* land, entrusted by God for public use. In 2007, a letter sent by the villagers to the Thai Prime Minister expressed that "this sacred principle cannot be compromised or twisted for the use of capital, as human laws often are by legal professionals. Those who hold state power have no right to destroy the religious principles which bind people through their faith in the power of the highest good that humans revere." The state law does not recognize the status and significance of the *wakaf* land, and yet no Muslim could lie or distort the fact that the land in question was such.

The morality of compensation

Given that the PTT is the biggest petrochemicals company in Thailand, there is little hope that the government will honour the values held by the Muslim communities. And yet, the nature of the project has caused many villagers to even refuse to accept compensation for the environmental damage caused by it. According to villagers, "It's sinful money, and we would be too ashamed to give any excuse to God had we taken it."

Further info and solidarity:

Both the Cornerhouse <www.thecornerhouse.org.uk> and Friends of the Earth <www.foe.co.uk> have more information about the villagers struggle. Simply go to the links and search for "Chana".

To send a message of solidarity to the Thai villagers, please send an email with "Chana" in the subject field, to: solidarity@lineonweb.org.uk before Sept 31st 2008, & we will forward your message to the local community. Local contact: Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability: aeps40@gmail.com (Please replace "[AT]" with "@".)

Monthly Forums



Photo Credit: Alan Pegg

LINE meets usually on the second Sunday of each month at the Muslim World League in London, and visitors are very welcome. Our forums are fun, engaging and like all of our activities there is an emphasis on the process, or means, by which we pursue our objectives. The format of these forums usually looks something like this: In the first half, we hear our speaker talk on a specific topic and we then have an open discussion. In the second half we hear feedback on recent events, and we may also begin dialogue on new topics. At the end of each forum there is the option of a trip to a local cafe.

Please also see our website for up-to-date info, including upcoming speakers, workshops & talks.

Web Stuff

Our website has up-to-date information on our events, monthly forums and campaigns. There is also a comprehensive background account on Islamic environmentalism in the UK, as well as literature you can download on Islam, ecology, climate change, and more.

We have also recently uploaded several audios, including talks from a couple of our monthly forums. You can find these by clicking on the 'Resources' link.

www.lineonweb.org.uk

To China, But How? A Journey of Connectedness

Having chosen to travel from the UK to China.....without flying,
Gareth Lloyd shares some adventures in Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.

Passu Glacier in the Karakoram mountains



During idle moments of collecting a host of articles on my fantasy destinations around the world, I told myself, "One day I'll go see these places... but not now".

But, why not now? One reason against this idea, was living with the guilt that comes with flying and its contribution to climate change. But then Marco Polo went to Beijing with no possibility for him to fly, so why not me? With this thought, the option of travelling to China without flying became more real. My destinations began to gel together, and eventually strung out along one long surface trip that I would take, mostly by train.

Into the world of Islam

Along the way, big cities were often interesting, but rarely enjoyable. The big exception was Istanbul. Its skyline of soaring minarets and the brooding domes of the grand mosques are sublime. This is the geographical division between Europe and Asia, West and East, Christendom and Islam. It is well-chosen. Here, I crossed the atmospheric Bosphorus strait and was well on my way. Continuing east, my carbon-virtue took a knock with those bottles of propane fuelling our hot air balloon up into the skies above Cappadocia. But denying myself the sight of that other-worldly landscape from the air would have been simply too hard.

Into Iran, and I was instructed that it's not only women who must be modest there. I was walking with my three-quarter length trousers rolled up to just above my knee and a passing imam gently reprimanded me. My local companion was embarrassed, but my main concern was not to cause offence.

The grand mosque in Esfahan is the jewel of Iran and was built by the same architect who built the Taj Mahal. It doesn't have the Taj's

exquisite symmetry, but makes up for it with glorious blue-green tiling. Leaving Esfahan, I then followed in the footsteps of Marco and Alexander across the Baluchistan desert and into Pakistan.

Glacier melt in Pakistan

Up in the northern areas of Pakistan I saw the evidence marking the kilometres of retreat that the *Passu glacier had recently undergone. Without these glaciers in the Karakoram mountains, the Indus River, the lifeblood of Pakistan, will dry up. It's one thing to hear about polar ice cap melt and glacier retreat, but it has a profound impact when you see it with your own eyes. Will we have to directly witness the deadly effects of climate change before taking serious action?

The 20-hour bus journey up into the northern areas had been such an ordeal that I'd opted to return by plane back to Rawalpindi. But altruism got the better of me and I traded in my flight refund for a bunch of blankets to take to the earthquake zone. The peculiar sensation of feeling the solid ground quake and move was disturbing to me as the newcomer whilst the locals continued eating their daal and rice without a flinch. For peace of mind, however, we stayed in the concrete house of the Imam, about the only safe structure in the village.

Unexpected connectedness

A sensation I hadn't expected on this trip was that of *connectedness*. I had been to the Far East and China before, but this time I hadn't been 'materialised' there by a metal tube, an airplane. I could viscerally *sense* my land journey all the way from Stonehenge, my starting point in the UK. The long trek through a multitude of peoples, languages, scripts, customs and cultures was present in my spirit. Now in Beijing, I felt there had been no sudden demarcations in the way people looked, but a gradual blending, and I felt connected by that stream flowing all the way from England.

*The Passu is amongst the largest glaciers in the world.

Travel tip

To find out how to travel abroad without flying, check out this website which Gareth also used to help him plan his trip to China:
www.seat61.com

Nature and Us: The Teacher and the Student

■ Muzammal Hussain

Is nature backwards, or are we? In a world of ipods, mobile communication devices and musical tones, we may become momentarily distracted, and fail to appreciate a more sophisticated 'world', upon which our very lives depend.

Wisdom of nature

As society succeeds in producing ever more complex goods for its 'convenience', its failure to deal wisely with what we no longer use, becomes increasingly problematic. Nature, it appears, is far ahead. For unlike 'modern' human societies, nature's wise choices as to both the chemical make-up and limits of what it produces allow it to recycle its entire production. Nature is able to keep up with itself, whilst modern human societies are out of step. Nature is grounded in an inner intelligence that modern societies have chosen to remove themselves from. Nature is indeed our teacher, if we are humble enough to be its student.

In Islamic teachings we are asked to contemplate the natural world – and in so doing we may notice the beauty and perfection it reflects. Through this process we are offered pearls of wisdom that can steer us towards mirroring these qualities within our communities. Just as nature submits to the Source of all creation, we may find ourselves better submitting to the same creative wisdom.

Shrinking of greed

As the items of endless economic growth and production increasingly invade the realm of our senses, the message of Islam offers a spiritual dimension that transcends the limited mindset of current waste management strategies. If recycling targets are one side of an important coin, then it must be said that targets for the shrinking of human and corporate greed could be the other. Whilst the technologies of recycling our waste assist us with the first side, the Qur'an, in the following verse emphasises the other:

“But waste not by excess: for God loves not the wasters.”

(Qur'an: 6: 141)

Bowing down to what?

The practise of Islam demands that we work at contracting our greed for excess, and to do this we must face our inner compulsions. Yet, if bowing down to God co-exists with the worshipping of the idols of consumerism and corporate culture, where is the pure religion that was revealed through the Prophets?

It seems clear that as people from all traditions unquestioningly take up what is currently viewed as 'normal' or 'fashionable', the need to recognise what is wise becomes ever more necessary - and in taking a leaf out of nature's wisdom, we may find our timely teachers as they submit to the Source of creation.

"Nature is grounded in an inner intelligence that modern societies have chosen to remove themselves from. Nature is indeed our teacher, if we are humble enough to be its student."

Reflective Questions:

1. Before buying something, take a moment to reflect on whether or not you actually *need* it. Do you need new clothes, or could you instead mend your old ones? How important is it really to have that latest techno-gadget? Do you need to do one-sided printing, or will two-sided do?
2. If producing or selling goods, consider reflecting on the value of the products. To what extent can they serve a higher purpose? Will they enhance real human relationships or lead to superficial ones? What is the life-span of the items being produced? Where might they end up if they are damaged, and what provisions do you offer to deal with this?

Useful Websites

Permaculture:

A framework for "creating sustainable human habitats by following nature's patterns":
Permaculture Association (Britain)
www.permaculture.org.uk

Freecycle:

Aims to build a worldwide gifting movement that reduces waste, saves precious resources & eases the burden on landfills while enabling members to benefit from the strength of a larger community". www.freecycle.org

London Community Recycling Network:

Dedicated to the vision of a world where resources are managed sustainably by the community, the authorities and enterprise.

www.lcrn.org.uk

NATURE

by Shakil Dawood

Nature's nature is generosity - what a heart must nature possess!

Nature is replete with beauty, vast in totality, an immensely various manifestation of elevated, extreme genius.

If a single rose petal is a wonder for the world - from the beginning of the universe to its end, how wondrous must be the entirety of nature - and the magnitude of its Creator?

Recent Activities

Over the last few months we've been involved in a number of activities, both local and national. Whilst international climate talks were taking place in Bali in December, we embraced the cold, windy and wet weather in London, to team up with about 10, 000 other campaigners, and marched to the US embassy at a national climate demonstration.

We've also had the honour of being represented and having dialogue at several events. These have included two stimulating inter-faith events in North London, a highly successful networking event organised by BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), and an invigorating public forum on climate change in East London organised in partnership with Rising Tide (London) and the World Development Movement (WDM). WDM have also included LINE in their interactive debate on climate change, "Turning up the Heat. Can big business really save the planet?"

At our monthly forums, we've had some excellent discussions stimulated by speakers from both inside and outside our network. Topics have included: Islam and Modern Social Movements; Hajj: Journey of a Pilgrim (with an ecological perspective on the pilgrimage); Islamic Environmentalism in the UK; Monetary Justice; Engaged Spirituality (reflecting on the life of the Prophet, as well as on Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan); & Justice, Trade & Islam; as well as an experiential workshop on 'Forum Theatre'.

Upcoming Events & Projects

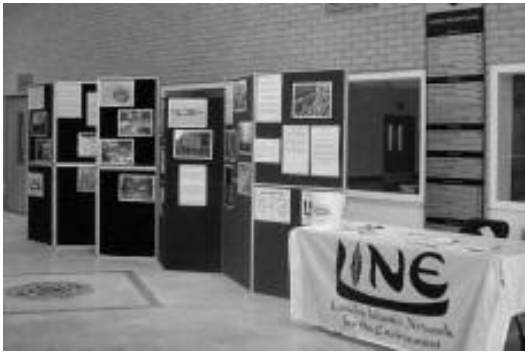


Photo Credit: Elizabeth Chawdhary

Climate Change & Islam: A Visual Journey

This exhibition comprises a selection of high quality photographs capturing climate change in different parts of the globe, including in a number of predominately Muslim countries. It also includes visual ideas on climate change solutions, and an exploration of what Islam says about the pressing challenge we face. So far we've displayed our exhibition at the Mile End Fair, the London Muslim Centre, Trafalgar Square and at a school in North London. If you'd like to discuss having our photoexhibition displayed at your mosque or other appropriate venue/community event then please get in touch. Please note, there may be a small fee to help cover expenses.

London International Climate Forum, Sat-Sun June 14th-15th 2008

[Organised by the Campaign against Climate Change (CCC)]

A full and diverse range of seminars and workshops as well as two plenary sessions. There is a line up of speakers from the UK and around the world – more info on the CCC Website: www.campaigncc.org LINE is looking to input at this forum. Currently we are organising a workshop on Banking and Economics, and have been invited to speak at a discussion on Faith & Climate Change.

To find our more, please check our website shortly before the forum date.

& More...

Please keep an eye on our website to stay up-to-date with our activities and events. (You can also receive email updates by joining our elist).

Receive Email Updates

LINE E-List

Do you know that you can stay updated with LINE activities on email? Just look for the link on the upper left hand side of our website (www.lineonweb.org.uk), and you'll be taken to the easy to follow instructions for subscribing (subscribers usually get about two to four emails a month).

Please note: To prevent anyone receiving unwanted emails, only those who subscribe to our list are added to it. Also, we have a strict policy of not passing your email address to any third party unless agreed by you in advance. This means that you shouldn't receive any spam through us.

Ecobites

There is also an elist called Ecobites which you may like to subscribe to. Although not a LINE list, this is UK-wide and would be relevant to anyone interested in Islamic environmentalism in the UK.

The easiest way to subscribe is by sending a blank email to:

Ecobites-subscribe@yahoo.com

You will then get a return email asking you to confirm your intention to subscribe. The easiest confirmation option is the one in which you simply reply to the email.

Would You Like to Support Us?

LINE was established in 2004 and quickly established itself as a respected grassroots network. Our work has grown beyond expectation, and we are now in considerable demand. To maintain high standards, we depend on help from reliable volunteers, as well as financial support. If our ethos resonates with you and you feel the urge to help us, please get in touch. In particular, we are calling for more people to commit to regular standing orders to fund our work. This would be of tremendous value in enabling us to develop our group, ensuring we retain a strong foundation whilst reaching outwards. If you would like to support us in this way, please visit the following webpage:

www.lineonweb.org.uk/Finance/donate



Newsletter Team

Editor:
Muzammal Hussain

Assistant Editor:
Shumaisa Khan

Designer:
Hyder Mohammad

Readers Tip

After you have finished reading your copy of *LINE leaf*, whilst we like the idea of recycling, another option might be to pass it on to a friend or colleague who may find this useful to read. If leaving at a public reading, or waiting room, please do check with the management to make sure you have their permission first!

Disclaimer

The views found in articles published in *LINE Leaf* should be viewed as being of those of the author at the time of writing, and are not necessarily held by LINE. Please also note that LINE is not responsible for the content of any website other than its own.

Web: www.lineonweb.org.uk

Email: leaf@lineonweb.org.uk

Tel: 0845 456 3960 (local rate)