

Four-Year Graduate Course in Islamic Theology to Start in Brazil

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
Tuesday, 14 February 2006

The Muslim Beneficent Society of the Santo Amaro neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo, in the Brazilian southeast, is planning to open a graduate course in Islamic Theology in Brazil.

According to the sheikh Hussam Al-Bustani, who is heading the project, the aim is to bring to the country the course from some Arab university. In the moment Al-Bustani is negotiating with the Al-Jinan University, located in the city of Tripoli, in Lebanon.

"The university is studying the legal implications," said the sheikh, who was in the Arab country last July to talk about the subject with the president of the institution, Mona Yacan.

The Lebanese university, according to Al-Bustani, combines the profile of Brazilians, as it is a modern institution, in which there are both men and women studying. It is a private university with many courses, amongst them Journalism, Administration, Translation and Islamic Studies.

There is a possibility, according to the sheikh, that the Islamic Theology course may be held at a school called Escola 24 de Março. The school, which belongs to the Muslim Armando Zoghbi and is on a plot of the Muslim Beneficent Society of Santo Amaro, next to the neighborhood mosque, provides elementary and secondary education.

There has already been a first try to open a university level course in Islamic Theology. In 2004, under the leadership of Al-Bustani, the course started in a building in the Tatuapé neighborhood, in the southeastern Brazilian city of São Paulo.

The aim, according to the sheikh, was to hold classes until the course was authorized by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry, however, did not give the authorization, as the course did not meet the necessary demands, and so classes were suspended at the end of one semester.

Now Al-Bustani believes the best option is to offer the graduate course from some Arab country. The diploma awarded to the students, however, will be of a foreign university.

According to the sheikh, the greatest interest in the course, in Brazil, is by people who are not Muslim and not even of Arab origin. "These people normally want to learn more about the Islamic religion," explained Al-Bustani.

The sheikh stated that graduation may open doors for those who take the course. "They may be hired by institutions from the Arab world to work in Brazil," he said.

He added that there are various associations from Muslim countries interested in spreading Islamic culture in Brazil. Salaries paid, according to the sheikh, tend to be greater than 3,000 reais (about US\$ 1,400).

Sheikh Hussam

Sheikh Hussam Al-Bustani is a great defender of the study of Islamic religion. Al-Bustani, who is Lebanese, arrived in Brazil in April 1993, hired to work at the Islamic Center for Promotion in Latin America, in the city of São Bernardo do Campo, in the Greater São Paulo.

Since then, however, he has already been in various institutions, among them the Brazilian Islamic School, in the Vila Carrão neighborhood, and at the Islamic Beneficent Society of São Miguel.

Since last year, however, he has been running school Paraíso das Crianças, which offers nursery and pre-schooling, and includes the teaching of Arabic, of the Koran and of the Islamic religion. Al-Bustani is also the coordinator of the Arab Language and Culture course at Escola 24 de Março.

If the project for the Islamic Theology college comes off paper, the sheikh will be responsible for the disciplines directly related to the Islamism course. Al-Bustani is graduated in Psychology, at Aligarh Muslim University, in India, and in Theology at the College of Theology and Promotion of Islam, in Beirut, Lebanon. The sheikh is also studying Pedagogy at the Presidente Prudente College (Fapepe), in the interior of São Paulo.

Graduation in Islamic Theology, according to Al-Bustani, will have an admittance test and will start with just one group. The course should last four years.

In the previous experience, the monthly fee was 250 reais (approximately US\$ 116). But prices for the college course have not yet been defined, neither has a date for the beginning of operations. The project has been in existence since 2000.

Project for the Islamic Theology College
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