



24 October 2024
Roxbury, MA

Thanks for reaching out to the Islamic Society of Boston (ISB) for comment on the recent resignation and retirement of some of our Trustees. Unfortunately the Boston Globe article from October 23, repeated in print on October 24, did not accurately represent the discussion the ISB Chairman Dr. Shuttari had with the Globe reporter.

At a time when false narratives are easily spread through sensationalist headlines and active misinformation campaigns, the Islamic Society of Boston will not accept any attempts to divide the Muslim community, regardless of the source of such campaigns.

These stories are designed to distract from our collective work of educating and uniting New Englanders, Muslims and non-Muslims, in accordance with the teachings of our faith, to build a better, more fair, more just society. We're disappointed that the Globe chose not to focus on the stream of Gazan children coming to Boston for treatment for horrific wounds.

ISB treats all allegations of racism, falsehoods regarding the financial stability or community engagement with the utmost seriousness. These are claims specifically designed to undermine confidence in an organization that is now run with a more diverse leadership team than prior to 2017, but with a much broader donor base, and a far more efficient operating model. While ISB, along with most religious organizations, saw a decline in donations due to being closed going from 2019 to 2020 due to the pandemic, donor revenues have been growing, not declining, by double digits percentages in each of the last four years.

The unwillingness to subsidize wasteful programs and independent organizations is at the core of this dispute. We are consistently delivering more programming for more constituencies precisely because of the diversity of volunteer support and our leadership team.

One simple example. Prior to 2019 any tour given at ISB Cultural Center was done by paying a contractor \$200 for each tour. The current board stopped this practice. Tours are now given by our staff and volunteers, and we have had well over 1,500 visitors with over 70 tour groups so far this year, a multi-fold increase since 2017.

Two of the former Trustees, Anwar Kazmi and Saoud Elhafi, have served for nearly forty years and we are tremendously grateful for their tireless service and commitment to the ISB, the Muslim and greater Boston community we serve. The other third trustee, Liz Ismail, has served for over five years.

The former chairman of the Board of Trustees (BOT) had resigned once before. He graciously came back to help guide the organization through a transition in 2019, when, under his

leadership, the Trustees adopted a new and more representative governance structure that is currently in place. This structure, consistent with that of many larger non-profits, has a Board of Trustees that is responsible for the facilities and endowment trust, as well as for appointing a diverse and representative Board of Directors (BOD). It is the Board of Directors that is responsible for overseeing the programs and operations of the organization at our two locations in Cambridge and Roxbury.

Regarding our current governance structure, all Directors are local volunteers (4 of 5 live in Roxbury, Quincy, Cambridge, Brookline respectively), and were selected by the Board of Trustees to serve four year terms. Since this new structure has been in place, we have far more diversity in our leadership, beginning with women in the top leadership positions. We are the first and largest Islamic organization in the New England area to have been led by women, and currently have three women, serving either as Trustees or Directors. Among our directors and senior staff are six African Americans, and two women of South Asian heritage. This is among the most diverse leadership teams of any Islamic organization in New England.

For the first time in the history of ISB, we are led by an African American Imam of Somali heritage to better represent the local community. For the first time we now offer Somali language programs.

The selection of the current Board of Directors was done by all the Trustees through a clear and transparent process ensuring that the board's composition reflects the strategic needs of ISB. But the core of the current dispute was the motion by the former Chairman of the BOT to appoint one of the departing trustees to serve as the sole and only member of the selection committee, which did not represent good governance. The motion was defeated by a majority of the trustees. A few days later, in a joint BOD/BOT meeting the aforementioned three trustees resigned at the start of the meeting.

It is normal and healthy for any organization to have changes in leadership and differing opinions on matters. However, we champion a democratic process where all voices are heard, and ultimately a majority of opinion is what brings us to a consensus. This process is built into our governance structure and bylaws and ISB leadership conducts its decision making through this agreed-upon process.

We also have hundreds of community members volunteering or supporting our programs and financially are back to pre-pandemic levels of revenue, but with a much leaner cost structure. This professional management discipline was necessitated by struggles all religious non profits went through during the pandemic. While getting back to pre-pandemic donation levels, we have successfully diversified our donor base so that we have many more donors rather than being dependent upon only a few large donors.

Our organization is now run like most other mosques, churches and synagogues in North America, with community members and volunteers driving both governance and programs, and a small support staff that keeps the building safe and clean, programs organized and handles operations and administrative functions.

It's pretty easy to measure the success of any religious non profit - namely the numbers of worshippers who come regularly and the donations received. The departure of the Trustees has no impact on operations which continue to run strong, with both centers having regular attendance of 2,000 worshippers weekly, including some of the largest, if not largest regular weekly spiritual gatherings in Boston. We have strong partnerships with local mosques, Islamic centers and many other Islamic and non-Muslim organizations, and continue to work tirelessly to strengthen these relationships and to build new ones. This is reflected in our programming to non-Muslims and Muslims alike, demonstrating that we uphold our Islamic values and responsibilities through these impactful partnerships.

We encourage anyone interested in learning more to visit on any Friday or contact us via email (office@isbcc.org) or phone.

The Trustees of the Islamic Society of Boston
100 Malcolm X Blvd
Roxbury, MA 02120