

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

First Mosque in Toowoomba and Darling Downs, Queensland

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Although originally built in 1968, surprisingly the church property at 217-221 West St, Toowoomba, Queensland is exactly facing the Kaaba in the city of Makkah. The oldest building on the property was built in 1910, just two years after the first mosque (Holland Park) in Queensland was established in 1908. Until last year no one could have thought that this church will be the first mosque in the city/region to serve over 1,500 Muslims of Toowoomba, a major regional city of about 1.5 hour drive from Brisbane with a population of around 160,000.

The property at 217-221 West St (corner of Stephan St, as marked red on the map below), Toowoomba, Australia with three buildings (photos below) was on sale since September 2012. It is located about 4km from the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), less than 0.5km from Toowoomba Hospital and within 2km from the city centre. The total land size of the property is 2765sqm. There are three separate entrances to the property with 800sqm of vacant land for parking. The church building fits our current needs for a mosque in Toowoomba. The Islamic Society of Toowoomba Inc (IST) decided to purchase the property in March 2013. To know more about the IST, its activities and the Masjid project, please click on www.isot.net.au



Location of the mosque property (marked in red)



The mosque building – built as a church in 1968 exactly facing the Kaaba



Partial view of the mosque property with three structures.

After the arrival of my family in Toowoomba from Canada, the first Eid prayers were held in our backyard. About 10-12 people participated in the congregation in 1993. In the morning the local daily newspaper sent a reporter to cover the story. The daily Chronicle published the news on the next day with a photograph of praying Muslims. Later I found that the Muslims were living in Toowoomba as early as early seventies, but the community was not large enough to form a viable Society or run a mosque.

To look after the religious and cultural needs of the growing community of Muslims in Toowoomba and the region the Islamic Society of Toowoomba (IST) Inc was established in 1994. I was elected as its founding President, Mr Yahya Anderson became the Secretary, and Mr Ejaz Ahmed became the Treasurer. At the same year the Society was incorporated with the Department of Fair Trading, Queensland. One of the main objectives of the Society was to establish a mosque in Toowoomba. It took 20 years to achieve this cherished objective with a lot of hard work of many people and support from the Muslims of almost every part of Australia.

Over the years IST became a member of the Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ), and Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), the peak body of all Muslims in Australia. The Society has played its role in leading the Muslims in Toowoomba and the region and working closely with other communities in Queensland, ICQ and AFIC. This long standing relationship at the state and national level of Islamic organisations and their leadership were highly valuable to get their support for the Masjid project.

Since 2011 IST has been trying hard to purchase land to build a mosque. We had a series of meetings with the Toowoomba Regional Council (TRC) and many real estate agents. Due to strict Council requirements to build

places of worship we gave up the idea purchasing land in 2012. In February 2013, I had a meeting with the USQ Vice Chancellor to seek help in this matter. A week later, Prof Jan Thomas invited me to see a church on sale. Dr Md Shahiduzzaman, Secretary of IST joined me and we liked the property but the high cost of nearly \$900,000 was a serious concern.



First strategy meeting in Islamic College of Brisbane on 2 March 2013

When the members of the community liked and became interested in the property, I proposed that every able Muslim family in Toowoomba will contribute one month salary so that one third of the purchase cost of the church comes from the local residents. In March 2013, we had a meeting with the leading Muslims of Brisbane and Gold Coast at the Islamic College of Brisbane (ICB). On my presentation of the project, everyone agreed that it was a good project and we could not afford to miss it. With the support of the Muslims in Brisbane I went to Sydney at the end of the month to get letter of support from the Grand Mufti of Australia and President of AFIC. In the same trip, I visited Armidale Musalla and Wollongong Masjid to seek support for the project. In May 2013 I made a presentation in the 49th Congress of AFIC on the Masjid project, but AFIC didn't have money to support financially.

As part of making sure that we don't face any uncertainty about the use of the church as a Masjid, we were able to receive a letter from the TRC confirming the ongoing use of the property as a place of worship on transfer of ownership. We also received letters of support from the (1) Grand Mufti of Australia, (2) Mayor, Toowoomba Regional Council, (3) Vice Chancellor, University of Southern Queensland, (4) President, Islamic Council of Queensland, and (5) President, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC).



Fundraising Team in Action in Kuraby Masjid on Friday 17 July 2013

On our request Br Yusuf Limbada, a founding trustee of the Kuraby Masjid, negotiated the contract with the vendor. The two levels of decision making of the Uniting Church, one committee in Toowoomba and a Synod in Brisbane, caused delay in reaching to an agreement on the conditions of the deal. On 14 June Dr Mainul Islam and I signed the contract with 10 month settlement period and a provision of early settlement with one month prior notice. A week after finalising the contract, we organised an event with the community leaders in which speakers included ICQ President Mohammad Yusuf, A/Prof Mohamad Abdalla, Bishop Robert McGuckin, Queensland Agriculture Minister Dr John McVeigh, and USQ VC Prof Jan Thomas.

The major fundraising initiative was undertaken in Brisbane and Gold Coast in Ramadan (July). With the help of relevant Societies/Trusts and respected Imams we were able to motivate the Muslim community through varieties of initiatives and efforts, from within and outside Brisbane. The campaign was unexpectedly successful and every one was surprised to see the amount of money received in this month. On 14 September 2013, we organised a fundraising dinner in the ICB Hall, Brisbane. This was very successful due to the hard work of Br Shahbaz Rafiq, Sr Sultana Deen, Br Mohammad Yusuf, Br A R Deen and many others. The amount of donation received from the dinner broke all previous record of fundraising in the Muslim community of Brisbane. We also organised another successful fundraising dinner in the MFIS, Sydney on 9 November 2013. This was possible due to the help of the members of IPDC and ICPC, and the support of Mr Keysar Trad, Dr Abul Jalaluddin, Mr Abdul Gani Chowdhury, Mr Zafar Ahmed, Riyaad Ally and many others.



Fundraising dinner at MFIS, Sydney on Saturday 9 November 2013

By the end of November we received sufficient donations to pray for the property. The property was settled on Thursday 16 January 2014. About a week prior to the settlement we invited the neighbours in an afternoon tea to keep them informed about our plans and take into account their concerns. The first prayers in the mosque were held on Friday 17 January from 4:30-8:30pm, Asr, Magrib and Isha. Pre-packed dinner was served to all participants. Imam Abdul Kader led the prayers. He was appointed as the first Imam of Muslims of Toowoomba in November 2013.



Handover of keys for first mosque in Toowoomba – Thursday 16 January 2014

A formal opening ceremony of the mosque was held on Sunday, 30 March 2014 in conjunction with the first Toowoomba International Food Festival (TIFF). Among others the event was addressed by Hon. Ian Macfarlane, Federal Minister of Industries, Mr Hafez Kassem, President of AFIC, Ms Agnes Whiten of ECCQ, Bishop Robert McGuckin, Imaam Yusuf Peer, Council of Imams Queensland, Mr Mohammad Yusuf, President of ICQ, Hon. Dr John McVeigh, Qld Minister of Agriculture, Prof Mohamad Abdalla, Cr Ms Ros Scotney representing the Mayor of Toowoomba, Mr Keysar Trad, Prof Ken Udas, DVC of USQ representing Vice Chancellor, Dr Abul Jalaluddin, Director of MCCA, and Prof Shahjahan Khan.



First prayers in Toowoomba Mosque on Friday 17 January 2014

Muslims in the city have been active, and play a significant role, in the multi-faith and multicultural fabric of the society through numerous community engagements which have helped foster harmonious relationships with the followers of different churches and faiths in Toowoomba. We have no doubt that a mosque in Toowoomba would make a significant positive addition to the cultural make-up and religious mosaic in the city.

The purchased property for the first mosque in Toowoomba will remain as a place of worship, and the worshippers will worship the same Almighty God, the Lord of all prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon all of them. This will serve as a source of Divine inspiration, spiritual guidance, and revealed knowledge for the benefit of humanity. It will remain open to everyone interested in worshipping Allah or knowing about Islam and Muslims, followers of the second largest religion on earth.

I thank TRC and congratulate The City of Toowoomba for its inclusiveness. We offer our very special thanks to every individual and institution that have been, and will be, involved in the process of establishing and maintaining this mosque with their inspiration and advice as well as providing spiritual, material, and financial contributions. May God bless our wonderful city of Toowoomba and guide its people to peace and prosperity. Special thanks to Mr Rafik Sabdia who worked as our Solicitor and Mr Aziz Khan who has been working as our Accountant free of charges.

Apart from Brisbane and Gold Coast, we received significant donations from Muslims in Sydney, Wollongong, Melbourne, Armidale, Hobart, Perth, Darwin, and Canberra. Jazak Allah Khair for everyone who was and will be a part of the mosque. The contributions have helped to open a significant chapter in the history of Toowoomba and set up a big milestone to the cultural and religious composition of the Garden City of Australia.