Title
Interview **Al-Hajj Rashid Gbadamosi** Former Director of Education Research of the Ministry of Education and Currently Registrar of the Islamic University College, Accra

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Description
The central purpose was our discussion of the genesis of the Islamic Education Unit of Ghana and the history of Muslim reactions to secular education. Also discussed in this interview is the increasing role of Iran in the provision of higher education in Ghana through its Islamic University College. As Registrar, the interview explored the course content of the university and his it has been received by the pubic.

Interview with Al-Hajj Rashid Gbandamoshi
Registrar, Islamic University College
14 July 2005: On Islamic Education and Religious Tolerance in Ghana

Self Introduction: I am Al-Hajj Gbandamoshi. I was one time Regional Director of Education for the Northern Region [of Ghana]. Before that I was Headmaster of the Tamale Secondary School. [It was after my position as Headmaster] that I became the Director of Education in charge of the Curriculum and Research Division at the Head Office of the Ghana Education Service Head Office in Accra. Later on, I was made the Director of the Manpower Division of the Ghana Education Service, and then I rose to become the Deputy Director General of Education and eventually becoming the Director of Education at the Ghana Education Service. I have since retired and I am now the Registrar of the Islamic University College [a private Islamic university in Accra, Ghana]. I have been in this last position since 2000.

Q: From my research work, you are very instrumental in the transformation of the traditional Islamic schools in Ghana into a modernized secular Islamic component. What was the idea behind [or the need] for the transformation of the schools into a modern Islamic and secular curriculum?

A. The reason why it became necessary to persuade proprietors to convert their Islamic schools into modern schools which meant the transformation of the Islamic schools into the NORMAL secular primary [elementary] schools was that the amount of teaching that was given at the traditional Quranic [Islamic] schools was not enough for pupils to function meaningfully in our present economic system. The traditional Islamic education might have been good enough in the old colonial days when the amount of knowledge needed to [be useful citizen] was not complex. But now, we have a more complex system and one has to have a [kind of] basic education that is basic for one to contribute meaningfully to the development of one's community and for the improvement of the individual's own life. That was the reason why effort was made and proprietors of

Islamic schools were called upon to convert their schools into Islamic institutions which will also embody aspects of secular education which will be needed for one to function in society.

Q. The observation is made around the world where Islamic schools such as in countries as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that Muslims are not interested in secular education and therefore they have become much more isolated in developments and thus have reacted negatively to formal education, scientific developments, and hence the current crisis in Islam. Is that your perception that Muslims cannot have secular education and therefore will be a detriment to the communities in which they live?

A. Actually there is a misconception about secular education and its relations to religious education. Secular education is an all-embracing concept. Education is education, whether Islamic or Christian education or any religious education. There is nothing like Christian education--there is education and that should include all aspects of learning and Islamic and Christian [religious thoughts] is extension of education. One has to be able to bring their Islamic education and Christian education and scientific education into a system that can be helpful for developing the individual for understanding others and for making it possible for people to inter-relate. So it is a mistake to say that religious education is apart from secular education. It is not, it is another aspect of normal secular education. So it is unfortunate that people think that these are two worlds. In other words, Islamic education is a part of the general education that children need to have. If people understood that by studying others knowledge and not restricting yourself to the knowledge that is your culture or faith, you may even become more able to understand yourself better and that those we have labeled as our enemies, are actually our friends and that the things that divide us as so small compared to that which unities. So this is a misunderstanding and this is why we are trying to disabuse our people of these [negative thoughts] and to let them come to accept that Islamic education is not different from secular education and that indeed people who are not Muslims also are studying about Islam as part of the general secular education curriculum. Even at this Islamic University College, for example, we have a Methodist Pastor who is just graduating and so there is nothing wrong for Islamic scholars to go to other denominational institutions to acquire knowledge.

Q. Does it mean that when religious education--Christian or Islamic--become part of the curriculum, students become better citizens of their societies?

A. Yes, that is why we regret that this institution was named the "Islamic University College." We should have left it out of the name because we do not want people to think that they are coming to this university to do a narrow minded type of development. We want people here to have a holistic development--a limitless field within which they can express themselves.

Q. Now that you touched on that topic, let me talk to you about your position as Registrar for the Islamic University. Can you tell me a little bit about the university itself?

A. The content of the university is secular. It is not sectarian.

Q. Who established this university?

A. This was established by the Ahl-Bait Foundation. It is a Non-Governmental Agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran. And I must say that the current President of the University who is instrumental in getting people to understand and to realize that it is more beneficial for the Muslims in Ghana and in Africa to get this university for the purpose of expanding their horizon than just building more Quranic schools which will not help them. I am not saying that Quranic education is not beneficial but it is limited in our complex society.

Q. As Registrar, you have to abide by the policies of the State Education system [in Ghana].

A. Yes, the point is that you cannot establish a university in Ghana unless you satisfy certain basic requirements of government policy and of the Ministry of Education before you can operate.

Q. Can you give me a sense or [examples] of these policies?

A. Well, the first thing is that you must have a content of courses must be evaluated to be to the standard that can be considered as university education. That is assessed to ensure that this is the case [necessary for academic accreditation]. You must also have the correct faculty and facilities such as libraries and other requirements necessary for one to offer the programs. Then above all you shouldn't be discriminatory with your selection of students and with policies. There should not be any direct policy of exclusion. The school should therefore be opened to Christians as well as Muslims.

Q. We have gone over this in [the pre-interview conversion] but what are the courses and program that are now accredited and approved for the Islamic University College?

A. In terms of programs we have Religious Studies (Islamic Option), and then we have Business Administration with specializations in Banking, Finance, Accounting, and Marketing. These are the programs that have been accredited for this institution for the time being. I should also draw your attention to the fact that we are a University College affiliated to Legon [The University of Ghana] and the University of Ghana certifies and grants certificates to our students. This practice will go on till we become an autonomous university. So this shows that there is nothing narrow about what we are doing here because the University of Ghana will not grant their degrees to our students until they are satisfied. Our courses are not a duplication of their offerings, rather they are equivalent to university level instruction and knowledge content or standards that they can support for certification.

Q. I have a final question for you. In my research in Islam education, when I have talked to people about what I am doing, their concern is that: "Now well now you have the

makaranta [Quranic schools], and you have Muslims running secular elementary schools at the Junior secondary level and some senior secondary schools that are Islamic. Now your have the University College of Islam." So it is possible for students who are Muslims to start from the kindergarten and go all the way to the university level of education without interacting with Christians and others people in the community and therefore this will breed conflict in the country in the future. What is your reaction to that?

A. When you come to these institutions you will come to meet others who adhere to other faiths. But even this were to be true at the elementary levels of learning, it will not be the case at the university level. You will come to meet Christians here. As I said earlier on we did not want to name this place as an "Islamic University", we want it to be an Islamic university college for everybody and that will teach you that we are not parochial. But having said that, it must be kept in mind that there is that prejudice or fear of secular education among our Muslim. Some of them will not let their children do anything with secular education because they think that Islam and secular education is incompatible. This is one of the things we want to change and to stress that Islam and secular education is compatible and that Islam actually calls on Muslims to [increase their knowledge greatly]. That there is no other way to go through education in Ghana without coming into contact with non-Muslims. This is the case even in the Islam JSS schools but our point is that [if you come to this Islamic schools, Muslims will have the facilities that will] allow them to continue practicing their religious because we have a Mosque on campus. We are not forcing people to worship according to Islamic teaching, and nobody will ask you to go to the Mosque to pray or to take part in any activities that will be against your conscious as a Christian or a non-believer. We are succeeding in making people understand that Islam and higher education are compatible and many parents are now allowing their daughters (the girls) to attend this university rather than to go to any other university where they think that they might not be given the opportunity to develop. But when they come here, they have the opportunity to be religious. We insist that our environment be Islamic because we do not allow people to drink and we do not sell alcoholic beverages here. We try to be very particular of our moral compartment and we assume people that his is a very important aspect of our education.

Q. So this concept of integration [of Muslims and others in the secular spaces] in this country. where does it come from [or to what can it be attributed]?

A. Actually we have been lucky in terms of religious relations. The conflicts are more within the faiths. These are more intra-religious conflicts than inter-religious conflicts in Ghana. Say conflict within the Muslim communities themselves (between different sects of Muslims] and or within the various denominations of Christianity. But we do not have serious communal conflicts, say Muslims against t Christians. it is not very pronounced in Ghana. Probably this is the result of the good sense of the earlier religious leaders which continues to bear fruits.

Thanks you so much for the conversation. Thanks.
 End of Interviews.