



**The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)**  
14th Annual Banquet

A large, dark blue silhouette of the United States map is centered on the page. The map is filled with a lighter blue color, and the text of the title is overlaid on it.

**American Muslims:  
Defining Ourselves**

Sunday, November 23, 2008



**CAIR**

# Program for the Evening

5:00 p.m.      **Registration/Maghrib Prayer**

6:30 p.m.      **Program Begins**

Master of Ceremonies – Ahmed Bedier

## **Quran Recitation**

### **2008 Awards -**

Rosa Parks Civil Rights Scholarship - Isha Mehmood

Community Service Awards -

    Youth Activism: Humza Kazmi

    Community Service: Asma Mirza

    Courage Award: Matt Zimmerman

**Debbie Almontaser**, Former Principal of the Khalil Gibran International Academy

**Nihad Awad**, CAIR Executive Director

## **CAIR Video Presentation**

**Fundraising** – Imam Siraj Wahhaj, Amir of the Muslim Alliance of North America

**Congressman Keith Ellison** (D-MN)

## **Ummrah Ticket Drawing**

9:30 p.m.      **Closing Duaa**

9:35 p.m.      **Entertainment by Azhar Usman** of the “Allah Made Me Funny Comedy Tour”

## Speakers' Bios



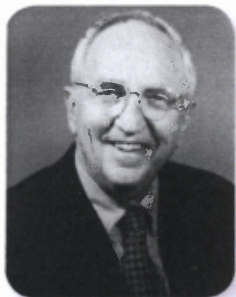
**Congressman Keith Ellison** represents the Fifth Congressional District of Minnesota in the United States House of Representatives after taking office on January 4, 2007.

Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Congressman Ellison graduated from Wayne State University in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. He moved to Minnesota in 1987 to attend the University of Minnesota Law School where he earned his law degree in 1990. He and his wife Kim, a high school math teacher, have since made Minnesota their home where they are raising their four children.

Congressman Ellison practiced law from 1990 to 2006 in both the private sector and as executive director of the Legal Rights Center. In 2004, he ran for the State Legislature from Legislative District 58B in North Minneapolis.

Ellison serves on the House Financial Services Committee, and the House Judiciary Committee. Both committees serve his legislative priorities well. Mr. Ellison's legislative include promoting peace, prosperity for working families, environmental sustainability, and promoting civil and human rights.

Ellison's election to Congress made both Minnesota and U.S. history by becoming the first African-American elected to the Congress from Minnesota, as well as the first Muslim American to be elected to the U.S. Congress.



**Ambassador Edward L. Peck** is a frequent Middle East commentator for television and radio worldwide. Ambassador Peck also lectures and teaches internationally on a broad range of foreign relations issues for governments, civic organizations and businesses.

During a 32-year diplomatic career, he served as chief of mission in Iraq and Mauritania, and as an embassy officer in Sweden, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt. He speaks Arabic, French, Spanish, and Swedish.

At the Reagan White House, he was deputy director of the Cabinet Task Force on Terrorism. At the State Department, he served as deputy coordinator for Covert Intelligence Programs, and liaison officer to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At the National Defense University, he was a fellow at the Institute for Higher Defense Studies.

Since retirement, Ambassador Peck has been executive secretary, American Academy of Diplomacy; chairman, Political Tradecraft Programs, National Foreign Affairs Training Center; distinguished visitor, National War College; Woodrow Wilson Foundation visiting fellow; member, Washington Institute of Foreign Affairs; and board member, Americans for Middle East Understanding.

He holds a B.S. from the UCLA and an MBA from George Washington. He had two active duty tours as a paratrooper, serving from private to 1st Lieutenant.





**Debbie Almontaser** is the founding and former principal of the Khalil Gibran International Academy. As a 17-year veteran of the New York City public school system, she taught special education, inclusion, trained teachers in literacy, and served as a multicultural specialist and diversity advisor. Presently she is the senior program manager of the 21st Century After School Programs at the Department of Education.

Ms. Almontaser frequently lectures and serves on panels as well as facilitates workshops on Arab culture, Islam, conflict resolution, cultural diversity, at local, national and international conferences. Ms. Almontaser co-designed a curriculum for the Muslim Communities Project at Columbia University and for Educators for Social Responsibility/Metro. In 2004, Ms. Almontaser received the Revson Fellowship at Columbia University award for her contributions to City life.

Ms. Almontaser has been quoted on Muslim Community issues and cultural diversity issues in the New York Times and profiled on the front page of the New York Times on her role in the founding of the Khalil Gibran International Academy. Ms. Almontaser was born in Yemen and raised in the United States. She acquired a B.A. in English from St. Francis College and World Religions and an M.S. in Multicultural Education and Reading from Adelphi University. She holds a certificate from Baruch College's School of Public Affairs through their Aspiring Leaders Program.



**Nihad Awad** is the national executive director and co-founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest non-profit Muslim civil rights organization in the United States. In 1997, Mr. Awad served on Vice President Al Gore's Civil Rights Advisory Panel to the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security. During the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, he was a key figure in the American Muslim Political Coordinating Committee (AMPCC), and subsequently, the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections, an umbrella organization of the largest American Muslim organizations. Mr. Awad helped to create the first Muslim voting bloc for a presidential elec-

tion. As a leader in the area of civil rights within the Muslim community, he has testified before both houses of Congress, on matters involving Muslims in America. Mr. Awad is a regular participant in the U.S. Department of State's "International Visitors Program", which welcomes foreign dignitaries, journalists and academics who are visiting the United States. He was also, voted as one of the National Journal's Top 100 Most Influential People in Washington, D.C., on religion and ethics; and has been interviewed frequently, on national and international media and print outlets such as *CNN*, *BBC World Service*, *PBS*, *C-SPAN*, *National Public Radio*, *Voice of America*, *Al-Jazeera*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.



**Imam Siraj Wahhaj** of Masjid AT- Taqwa in New York is well known among the Muslim community both domestically and internationally as one of the most dynamic and charismatic speaker and tireless supporter of Islamic causes. He has been very active in the Da'wah movement and improvement of the communities around him. Imam Siraj has been giving lectures around the world for more than three decades and is considered one of the most respected Muslim leaders in America.

Imam Siraj Wahhaj, currently the Imam of Masjid AT-Taqwa in Brooklyn, New York, accepted Islam in 1969. He received Imam training at Ummul Qura University of Makkah in 1978 and has gone on to become a national and international speaker on Islam.

Imam Siraj Wahhaj has been Vice President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) since 1997 and is a past member of its' planning committee. Imam Siraj Wahhaj has served on Majlis Ash-Shura, a consultative council of Islamic scholars) since 1987. He is currently the amir of the Muslim Alliance of North America (MANA) and has served as a member of the board of advisors for NAIT from 1989-1993.

Imam Siraj Wahhaj was the first Muslim to give invocation in the House of Representatives in 1991. He has appeared on national television talk shows about his anti-drug campaigns. He received high praises from the media and the New UYork Police Department for initiating anti-drug patrol in Brooklyn, New York, in 1988.



**Comedian Azhar Usman** is a Chicago-based stand up comedian. He is the co-founder of "*Allah Made Me Funny-The Official Muslim Comedy Tour,*" and he has performed in over a dozen countries on five continents.

Azhar and the tour have been featured in more than 100 major world media outlets. He has shared the stage with many of his favorite comedians, including Dave Chappelle, Jim Gaffigan, Russell Peters, Todd Barry, and the late Mitch Hedberg.

Azhar recently produced a concert/documentary project entitled "*ALLAH MADE ME FUNNY-LIVE IN CONCERT,*" which is a Kings-of-Comedy-style feature-length concert film. Additionally, he is star and creator of "*TINKU'S WORLD,*" a semi-scripted alternative web comedy show, and he is also developing a television show and a humor book project.



**Master of Ceremonies Ahmed Bedier** is president of the Tampa/Hillsborough Human Rights Council and host of "TrueTalk Live" a weekly public affairs program on NPR Tampa affiliate WMNF. Bedier is also the founder and former executive director of the Tampa Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

# Rosa Parks Scholarship Award Winner

**Isha Mehmood** is a master's student in American University's Justice, Law and Society program. She holds a bachelor's degree in communication and sociology from Virginia Tech. Committed to promoting civil and human rights, Isha currently interns at the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and is a teaching assistant for an undergraduate course, *The Deprivation of Liberty*. She is also active in the graduate and alumni chapter of Theta Nu Xi, a service-based multicultural sorority focused on issues of diversity, tolerance, and sisterhood. Prior to becoming a full-time student, Isha worked for Burness Communications, providing public relations support to health policy non-profit organizations. This winter, she will be participating in an alternative break trip with a focus on ending human rights violations in Guatemala.

**Rosa Louise McCauley Parks** was born in Alabama in 1913. Ms. Parks became an international icon when on December 1, 1955 she created what many have termed the defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement. On that evening, as Ms. Parks was returning home from work, she engaged in an act of civil disobedience, when she refused to move to the back of a public bus, in defiance of the laws of Alabama, which required blacks to sit in the backs of buses, while only white Americans were allowed to sit towards the front. After she was arrested and booked, supporters, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. orchestrated a boycott of the Montgomery Alabama public transportation system, crippling the bus system and sending the message to the entire world that black Americans would no longer accept the status of second class citizens in this country.

Ms. Parks eventually received many honors ranging from the 1979 *Spingarn Medal* to the *Congressional Gold Medal*. After she passed away on October 24, 2005, she was given the honor of lying in state at the Capitol Rotunda. She was also awarded a posthumous statue in the United States Capitol's *National Statuary Hall*. Ms. Parks was quoted as saying that she refused to move to the back of the bus that evening because she was "tired of giving in".



# 2008 Community Service Award Winners

## Youth Activism: Humza Kazmi

**Humza Kazmi** is a senior in the History Honors Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. When he was in the 9th grade, at two different occasions, he talked two of his friends out of committing suicide. Since then, Humza has worked on an anti-suicide campaign that helps teens and college students recognize signs of suicidal tendencies in their friends and educates them on ways to get help. He designed and distributed posters, brochures, and booklets to high schools and universities. Humza has created a website to provide resources to anti-suicide organizations. He has received awards at the local and national levels for his work.

Humza is a trained Emergency Medical Technician and a member of the Takoma Park Community Emergency Response Team that works alongside first responder units in case of natural disaster or other emergency situations. Humza is currently volunteering as court-appointed special advocate for abused or neglected children in the legal system.

## Community Service: Asma Mirza

**Asma Mirza** serves as President of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) National. She is the second female President in the organization's 45 year history. Mirza is currently an MBA Student at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland and a recent graduate of Georgetown University. She is a recent graduate of Georgetown University where she double majored in Management and Operations Information Management.

## Courage Award: Matt Zimmerman

**Matt Zimmerman** is a Senior Staff Attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, focusing on civil liberties, free speech, and privacy law. His practice further includes ongoing work in intellectual property law as well as government transparency issues. For the 2004 and 2006 elections, he coordinated a team of nationwide legal volunteers who responded to election-day problems with e-voting technology for the non-partisan Election Protection Coalition. He currently heads EFF's efforts to coordinate nationwide e-voting litigation and amicus support and evaluate emerging voting technology. Prior to joining EFF, Matt was a Privacy Fellow at the public interest law firm The First Amendment Project where he specialized in privacy and open government issues. Previously, Matt worked at the international law firm *Morrison & Foerster LLP*, where he focused on technology and commercial litigation matters, and the nonprofit advocacy organization *The First Amendment Project*, where he specialized in privacy and free speech issues. He earned his law degree from *Columbia University* and his undergraduate degree from the *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.



# Proclamations

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November 23, 2008

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)  
453 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to extend warm greetings to everyone gathered for CAIR's 14<sup>th</sup> annual banquet.

I applaud CAIR for its important role in advocating for civil liberties, enhancing the understanding of Islam, and condemning acts of terrorism.

I hope you all have a wonderful evening and I look forward to working together in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lois Capps".

LOIS CAPPS  
Member of Congress

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

TOM DAVIS  
ELEVENTH DISTRICT  
VIRGINIA

November 23, 2008

Dear Friends:

I wish to send a warm welcome for the national banquet of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). It is important that we recognize the many positive contributions American Muslims continue to make in our communities. As you gather to share ideas, create alliances and network with one another, may you continue to foster the principles of brotherhood, equality, mutual assistance, religious tolerance, peace and justice.

I applaud all of you for participating in this year's event. Please accept my most sincere wishes for a successful banquet.

With warm regards I remain,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Davis".

Tom Davis  
Member of Congress