

Muslims and islam ecuador



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Scholarship about Muslims and Islam has generally been delimited geographically in the Middle East. After the 9/11 attacks, the renewed interest about Islam in general exposed the existence of a sizable Muslim population in the Latin Americas (Hallar). While the migration of Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians in the late 1800s accounted for the greater number of Muslims in Latin America now, new converts to Islam also characterize the Muslim population today. In Ecuador, where the Muslim population is a very small minority compared to the predominantly Roman Catholic group, not much has been written about them, their history, their way of life, and the different challenges they experience living in adherence to their professed faith. This paper traces the history and origins of Muslims in Ecuador, their contemporary experiences, contributions, and problems.

In 2008, the Ecuadorian constitution recognized the “ megadiversity” of the biological and economic species in the country, protecting it by making ecosystem rights or the “ rights of nature” legally enforceable in the country (Central Intelligence Agency). Located along the Earth’s equator, hence the name, Ecuador is home to the famous Galapagos Islands and the most biologically diverse ecosystem in the world.

Ecuador’s megadiversity also applies to its population. Estimated at around 14, 790, 608, the country is the 65th largest country in the world in terms of population; it is also one of the most ethnically diverse (Central Intelligence Agency). Its majority group, the mestizos, were descendants of the intermarriage of the Spanish conquistadores and its indigenous people and comprise more than 65% of the population. Accounting for a quarter of the Ecuadorian population are Amerindians; the creoles account for 7%; and

Ecuadorians account for 3%. Religion-wise, Ecuador is home to predominantly Roman Catholic believers which account for 95% of the population, with 4% following Protestantism, 1% Mormons, and a minority of nativists, Jews, and Muslims. The Pew Research Center (2009) estimates a Muslim population of roughly 500 individuals in Ecuador. Today, Ecuadorian Muslims are struggling to define their place and their identity in a world that has grown more aware of their existence. An increasing number of Ecuadorians are also discovering a new way of life as they embrace and convert to Islam.

History and origins of Ecuadorian Muslims

Thirty to fifty centuries ago, three Ecuadorian Indian cultures were dominant namely the Chorrera, Machalilla, and Chordeleg. Their religion involved worshipping the sun and the chief of the villages were believed to be sent by the “ Sun God.” Part of their religious practices is the offering of young women who were virgins as human sacrifices as a gesture of gratitude for the bountiful harvest. These early Ecuadorians believe that the body will resurrect after death and because of this belief, they bury gold, spears, drinks, food, and many others that will prepare them in their journey in the afterlife.

Years after, the Incas who defeated the southern Ecuadorian tribes almost shared the practices and beliefs as the other Indian tribes. When the Spaniards conquered the American continent, the transition to Catholicism was not dramatic. The Catholics merely had to change the “ Sun God” to the statue of the half-naked “ Son of God” nailed to the cross.

One king of the Incas by the name of “ Atahualpa” was burned alive because of his strong rejection towards Christianity. Forced by the Spaniards to denounce his ancient beliefs, the Inca king threw the Bible in protest. His defiance catapulted to his execution for blasphemy. Since this period, Roman Catholicism was the official religion in Ecuador.

More than 100 years has passed, Protestantism penetrated Ecuador then other religious sects followed- Seventh-day Adventist, Latter-day Saints, Anglicans, Gnostics, Bahais and others. Indian and Far Eastern philosophies have attracted followers over the last twenty to thirty years. The Jewish people in Ecuador had no formal leadership until 2001 when a representative from the Jewish community in Argentina was appointed as their head.

First Muslim Settlers

The very first Muslims who settled in Ecuador were Arabians from Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon. Their emigration to the Latin continent was because of their search for peace and solitude from the ravages of World War I and II. With Turkish passports in possession issued by the Ottoman Empire, these Muslims have entered the Ecuadorian soil. Because of this, the first Muslim settlers were known throughout Ecuador as the “ Turks”. The Turks first settled in Quito, the capital city and Guayaquil, the principal seaport in the Pacific Ocean. Some of these Turks went to the coastal areas in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Los Rios, and Manab. What attracted the Turks very much is the tranquility of the country. The family-oriented culture in Ecuador have probably reminded the Turks of their own homes in their respective countries.

The principal economic activity of the first Ecuadorian Muslims was trading. In the beginning, the economy of Ecuador largely depended on barter trading or the interchanging of goods and products. During the first twenty to thirty years, the Muslims encountered numerous challenges in local trade and commerce. The distances they had to walk is very long, follow the post service through the mule's back, and try to reach the most accessible community or village to do business. The first Muslims in this South American country were exposed to different customs, fashion, and gastronomy. They exchange their goods such as dates or "Tamar", rose water or "maiy zahar", mashed fried peas or "falafel", and laborious sweets like "basbusa" and "baklawa" with the local wheat flour or "pinol", herb water or "agua aromatic", dark sugar cane or "panela" and banana.

The Muslim Identity

Since the aim of coming to Ecuador for most of the first Muslim settlers is to seek "Dunya," they had a very poor background about their religion and consequently their identity as Muslims was overshadowed by the strong and dominant Roman Catholic religion. Very few of the early Muslims have settled with their spouses from their native countries while majority married with the locals. The earlier Muslim families in Ecuador were the Jairala, Becdach, A'riz, Shayyeb, Soloh, Dassum, among others. Unfortunately for some of their descendants, some opted to be converted to Christianity as their only religious option. Few of the Muslim families would have their children educated under an Islam-based curriculum in Muslim countries.

By the later part of the 1940s, Muslims and Arab Christians were grouped as one due to their Arabic roots. The first organization of Muslims and Arab

Christians is known as “ Lecla”. Issues of their different religious orientation were not discussed. Then by the middle of the 1980s, a social organization emerged and this is known as the “ Arab Club”. Approximately during this period, there was increased migration of Muslims to Ecuador. Roughly 20 Egyptian men were struggling to reach US shores without considering the risks involved. Dishonest travel agencies are using Ecuador as their gateway to the US. Eventually some of them left Ecuador while others choose to stay in the country.

A minor migration involving Indian Pakistanis occurred in the early 1990 and majority have reached their migratory goals in Canada and the US and they leave no trace or indication of their religious affiliation with Islam. As the 20th century comes to a close, Muslim migrants came from countries in West Africa such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia, whose internal conflict and civil disruptions have pushed them in search of the new place to rebuild their lives.

The mid 1980s saw the embracing of Islam by the local Ecuadorian populace. Though the word Islam is unheard of, the locals were highly influenced by the piety of the Muslims while studying in the US and European universities. They have come to regard Islam as a religion for all therefore it is universal. Aside from that they considered the religion a brotherhood which brings people from all walks of life to work harmoniously to attain peace. Islam also offered teachings not found in the Catholic teachings. Despite the fact that these new Muslims enthusiastically propagated their religion in Ecuador, it was a struggle by going against the current. In the mid 90s, the number of Ecuadorian Muslim converts continue to grow. At present, every Friday

marks at least a single “ Shahada”. This growing trend came to terms with criticism and rejection every within their closest kin. There are roughly 500 Muslims living in Ecuador today.

A Muslim Heritage

Muslims in Ecuador and in Latin America in general derive a unique kind of heritage from the region’s political history. This heritage dates back to 711 when the Muslim Moors led by Tariq ibn Zayid conquered Spain for 700 years. For seven centuries of Muslim rule, Spain became influenced by Islamic music, literature, and architecture. Religious tolerance as preached by Islam allowed the mutual existence of various religious denominations such as Judaism and Christianity. Unlike other conquerors, the Moors preached Islam but did not impose conversion to their religion. When the Muslim conquest ended by 1492, all Muslims were forced back into Christianity with the threat of exile or execution. During the heydays of the Spanish inquisition, the conquistadores started to ship off Muslim slaves to the New World and Africa – and these Muslim eventually landed in Latin America. The forced migration of Muslim slaves as well as the migration of Muslim Arabs of the Ottoman Empire started the spread of Islam into the continent.

Many Muslims in Latin America believe that Islamic conversion enables them to reclaim their true heritage. Muslim scholars assert that European influence came much later than African/Islamic influence. Evidence of this is in the Spanish language itself, literature, philosophy, and music. Latino culture then derives a large part from the contributions of the first Muslim settlers

shipped off from the Iberian Peninsula. As Islam spread quickly, it became a profound influence on the Latino way of life (Vendan and Pervost 28).

This assertion is contentious however because historical books and documents do not mention the contributions of Islamic heritage in Latino culture save for a few aspects. The educational system also does not teach about Islamic values and its impact on present Latino American culture. Some of the great contributions of Islam to cities in Latin American include the magnificent Islamic architecture that has built the cities of South America. Brazil's old churches are designed with Arabic calligraphy carved by Muslim slaves brought to the continent from the Iberian Peninsula. Islamic art is also prominent in many Central American churches. Many churches all over South American also install mosque arches and domes, typically Islamic architectural styles. In Quito, Ecuador, Islamic art can be found in the Andalusian Spanish architectural style copied from Islamic architecture. Andalusian Islamic architecture is also visible in Quito's downtown area (Suquillo, "Islamic Values in Latin American Culture").

Major and minor traces of the influence of Muslims in Ecuador occurred as a result of Muslim migration into the country. Aside from art, language, and architecture, Islamic values such as hard work, industry, affinity for trading as well as Arabic food form a great contribution to the diverse and beautiful culture in Latin America today (Vendan and Pervost 33).

Aside from viewing conversion to Islam as a historical necessity, the younger generation of Latinos is attracted to Islam because of their disenchantment with Catholicism. Many Latino Muslims view Catholicism as an elitist religion

which has historically disenfranchised many of the continent's poor and indigenous populations. Many also view Catholicism as having been detrimental to the rights of indigenous ancestors. Among native Latinos who convert to Islam, there is a prevalent view that Catholicism has only served the poor in theory but not in practice. Today, Catholicism has not played a major role in improving the plight of the disadvantaged and have not defended their rights adequately as a church should. Instead of the 'elitist' Roman Catholic Church, many view Islam as the true religion of the oppressed.

This view seems to explain why Islam appeals to minority groups in Latin America and elsewhere. Most of the Islamic conversions belong to marginalized groups and those who are struggling for equality. Many activists and progressive thinkers have also found a more effective ally in Islam as the Qur'an does not only delve in religious issues but in political issues as well. In choosing Islam, some "became serious young men seeking to elevate ourselves within our society. We got this from Islam" (qtd. in Viscidi). Some Muslim scholars hypothesize the Islam's strong position on unity and racial equality is an appealing concept to minority and disadvantaged groups (Vendan and Pervost 34). This also explains why more and more African Americans in the U. S. have converted to Islam in the past decades. To many who decide to convert to Islam, it is "a universal faith where people of all walks of life pray together. Religion unifies culture and enhances it" (qtd. in Sanchez and Juan 33).

Ecuadorian converts have also cited how Islam provides both material and spiritual support for its faithful. For instance, the track record of Muslim

religious organizations indicates that it caters not only to the needs of Muslims but non-Muslims as well. Elsewhere in the world, Muslim organizations provide welfare services, education programs, clothing drives, training for women, and anti-poverty measures to ease the plight of the disadvantaged.

However attractive Islam may be to many, Latino Muslims experience a conflict of identity because Catholicism has been so deeply ingrained in their culture. Some who are thinking of converting may feel that their conversion to Islam may be construed as being traitors to their Catholic heritage. Moreover, converts also face the difficulty of being accepted into the mainstream community. Being part of the “other” has a strong possibility of getting converts alienated or even disowned by their families or peers (Cook 4). Despite their many activities and their presence, Muslim organizations still find that many people have no knowledge or are ignorant about Islam. This is why Muslim religious organizations are striving to get people to know more about Islam and dispel wrong notions and biases about Muslims and Islamic doctrine (Suquillo, “Islam in Ecuador”).

Muslim Religious Organizations

The wave of migration to the Americas marked the influx of Lebanese and Palestinian immigrants to Ecuador in the 1800s. While majority of them were of Arab ancestry and remnants of the Ottoman Empire, some of them were Christians and some of them became assimilated into their new country as Christians. Nonetheless, some of them also remained Muslims. Historical records suggest that the earliest Lebanese immigrants came to Ecuador in 1850. They carried with them Islamic values, traditions, and culture - an

<https://assignbuster.com/muslims-and-islam-ecuador/>

aspect that made life difficult for them initially. Majority of the Lebanese Muslims which migrated first were male and settled first at the country's capital, Guayaquil. The women came later. Like most migrants, they found it difficult to adjust to the host country; they faced discrimination but were determined to make a prosperous life in Ecuador. Most of them became entrepreneurs and owned stores. Soon, some of the most important political players in Ecuador were of Arab ancestry: from Assad Bucaram Elmhalm in 1916, to Guayaquil's mayor in 1996 Jamil Mahuad Witt, and former Vice President Alberto Dahik Garzosi (Roberts 13). While many Middle Eastern migrants became assimilated into the Catholic way of life, a few of them remained adherents of Islam and strived to build their own community and follow their own traditions while respecting the dominant culture.

Muslims in Ecuador belong to a tight-knit community of worshippers. During the middle of the 1900s, native Ecuadorians became converts of Islam and chose to live close to the Arab community. In order to perform prayers, they first rented a small apartment which later became a private apartment provided by the Egyptian Embassy. The Ecuadorian constitution requires all religious organizations to register in order to exercise freedom of religion.

In Ecuador, the first and largest religious organization officially registered with the government is the Centro Islámico del Ecuador. Founded in 1994, the Center receives Muslims and non-Muslims alike and is a hub not only for religious purposes but also for socio-cultural and educational activities supposed by the teachings of Sunni Islam. Unlike many masjids, the Center is an independent entity that is built without any foreign financial support.

The Center also serves to help to develop a “ genuine Muslim Ecuadorian identity” guided and inspired by values of Islam (Suquillo, “ Islam in Ecuador”). In its early years, the masjid occupied only the first floor of the Center. Soon, it was transferred to a residential area in order to make the masjid more convenient for residents.

The Center serves as a gathering place of Ecuadorian Muslims and a venue from which non-Muslims could learn more about Islam and the Islamic way of life. Through the Center, misconceptions about Islam are resolved so that a better understanding of Islam is presented to non-Muslims. For Muslims, the Center educates young and old Muslims about the Holy Qur’an and the Arabic language. Moreover, it specially caters to women who comprise many of Muslim converts through lectures and a well-stocked library that offers books written in Spanish, English, and French.

Part of the responsibility of the Islamic Center is the translation and publication of Spanish literature which tackle on various topics on Islam. The center has also translated five books to Spanish: ‘ What the Bible says about Muhammad?’, ‘ Understanding Muslims and Islam’, ‘ Tawheed’, ‘ Muslim Christian Dialogue’ and ‘ The truth about Jesus’. Spanish pamphlets were also published and they are entitled: ‘ Islam at glance’, ‘ Mount Arafat Sermon’, ‘ Do you know that (the Pope at the time of our Prophet Muhammad SAAWS, embraced Islam?)’, ‘ General aspects about fasting in Ramadan’, ‘ Misconceptions about Jihad’, ‘ Danger in dancing’, ‘ Is Jesus really God?’, ‘ You should know about this great man (Prophet Muhammad SAAWS)’, ‘ Who invented the trinity?’, ‘ What is Islam?’, ‘ Islamic Fundamentalism?’, ‘ What Islam is not about’, ‘ Muhammad in the Bible’, ‘
<https://assignbuster.com/muslims-and-islam-ecuador/>

Fire in your stomachs (about alcohol)', and ' According to the Bible, Jews have no right on Palestinian land' (Suquillo, " Islam in Ecuador").

There are two other Muslim religious organizations in Ecuador: the Centro Islámico Al Hijra and the Fundacion Islamica Cultural Khalid Ibn Al Walid. The Centro Islámico Al Hijra is also located in Guayaquil while the Fundacion is located in Quito, Ecuador (Islamic Finder).

Worship in the Masjid

Prayer is central to Ecuadorian Muslims. Worship in the masjid is the same for Ecuadorian Muslims as with all other Muslims anywhere in the world. It is mandatory to remove shoes or slippers when entering a mosque – a practice that reflects respect for the house of prayer and its worshippers. The prayer halls in the masjid contain no benches or chairs, only carpets which are aligned to face Mecca, Islam's holy city.

Ecuadorian Muslims go to the masjid in order to perform salat, one of the " five pillars" of the Islamic faith. Prayers are organized five times a day. The masjid in Ecuador is open one hour before the obligatory Fard prayers. However, the faithful can offer five prayers all throughout the day from their home: Fajr (before sunrise), Dhuhur (afternoon), Asr (midday), Maghrib (after sunset) and Isha'a (after dusk) (Islamic Finder). Ecuadorian Muslims can find out the proper prayer times throughout the day from the announcements posted near the masjid and even online (Islamic Finder). The Islamic weekly holy day is Friday.

Prayers inside the masjid are performed by men but not for women. This tradition has been sometimes criticized as discriminatory for women.

<https://assignbuster.com/muslims-and-islam-ecuador/>

However, Muslim scholars have cited that the rationale behind this prohibition is to uphold the rules regarding the interaction of men and women as written in the Qur'an. Women can worship in the masjid from separate chambers where they can see the imam or the prayer leader. Most Ecuadorian Muslim women also prefer to pray from their homes.

Before formal prayers, all are required to perform a ritual of cleaning called wudu where the ears, face, arms, hands, and feet are washed. The masjid has washrooms for men and women for this purpose. Worshippers step into the prayer hall with the right foot and say in Arabic “ Oh Allah, open the door of mercy for me” (Asani). Two cycles of prayer are then performed, followed by a salutation (tahiyyatul-majid) and the sequence of standing-kneeling-prostration.

Reasons for Conversion to Islam

Muslims in Ecuador have a unique experience as they practice their faith. Belonging to a community of faithful comprising less than 1 percent of the population, it is not unusual that many Ecuadorians are not aware that there are Muslims at all. Hence, educating non-Muslims about the tradition and practices of Muslim Ecuadorians is a challenge. However, the number of annual converts to Islam in Ecuador has surprisingly increased and the Muslim community is undergoing changes as a consequence.

Yahya Juan Suquillo, Ecuador's imam or religious leader, states that the notion that Islam attracts few converts is untrue. In fact, the conversion rate among Christians is going at an accelerated pace. Suquillo, who was named one of the 500 most influential Muslim leaders of 2009, believes that Islam's

appeal in Ecuador as well as in Latin America comes at a time when the whole continent is in search of its own identity (The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre 24). The social problems that beset the continent have made its people look for spiritual change – and Islam has a unique brand of spirituality that appeals to most people. Latin America is fertile ground for Islamic dawah and the transition from Christianity to Islam is not so difficult since Islamic influence is already inherent in Latino culture. However, Muslim religious organizations have fallen short in identifying the strong potential Latinos to accept Islam despite the predominance of Catholicism (Suquillo, “Islam in Ecuador”).

Ecuadorian Muslims are also in search of their Islamic identity – which they found at home and abroad. Some Ecuadorian Muslims are economically well-off and can send their children abroad to study Arabic and Islamic Studies. Some who have gone on to study in Cairo were descendants of the original Muslim settlers in Ecuador: “ My grandfather on my mother’s side helped bring Islam to Ecuador, I belong to that family and it makes me proud” (Delgado qtd. in Makary).

One of the biggest challenges for the Ecuadorian Muslim population is how to integrate their increasing number of indigenous converts into the Muslim ummah. There are many aspects about Islam that attracted converts in Ecuador. Some have cited that the modesty and religiosity of Islam is what they admired most in the religion. Others have also cited the consistency of Islamic doctrine as opposed to Catholicism. Others have also cited the influence of a Muslim friend or colleague they admired (Rich). Some find that the record of Islamic communities in maintaining order and cleaning up

neighborhoods of crime and poverty was the most admirable thing about the religion. Converts who have been exposed to crime, drugs, and prostitution find sincerity in the Islamic community to help them reform. There is also an attraction in what Islam offers: the “ return to traditional values” (Sesin). Like many Latino converts to Islam, Ecuadorian Muslim converts also believe that Islam offers a new kind of spirituality than what they have been accustomed to. Others cited the that Islam offered a strictly monotheistic view compared to Catholicism which teaches the concept of the Trinity as well as belief in the Virgin Mary and Catholic saints. It also is surprising that instead of viewing Islam as repressive against women, female converts state that Islam provides a view of women with dignity and respect - something that is not highlighted in other religions (Sanchez and Juan 26).

Islamic doctrine is also one of the main attractions of the religion not only in Ecuador but in Latin America in general. Islamic principles are consistent with the tight and devout family values which characterize Latin American households. According an Ecuadorian Muslim:

“ There are cultural similarities and family values inherent to Hispanics and Muslims. Typically, Hispanic households are tight knit and devout, and children are reared in a strict environment - traits that mirror Muslim households” (Guadalupe qtd. in “ Pick Islam”)

Moreover, in terms of doctrine, Islam resolves some of the issues that most people have with Catholicism. Islam’s absence of a papal hierarchy makes everyone equal in the presence of God. The definition of “ God” in Islam is also less ambivalent, as there is only Allah unlike the Catholic Church which

promotes the worship of Saints, and the Virgin Mary. In Islam, many feel that “ Everyone who prays before God is equal” (qtd. in Viscidi).

Other family-related values and close kinship ties are integral to Muslim communities; the same is true for Hispanic communities. There are several Islamic norms which mirror those highly valued by Hispanics such as respect for the elderly, child rearing, and the value/role of marriage (Sanchez and Juan 32). To many converts, Islam has helped them live a life of moderation and appreciation for family and motherhood (“ Pick Islam”). Islam has also provided converts with a belief system that spoke of kindness, respect, and love for family. Some converts expressed that because Islamic principles consider moderation rather than competition or ambition as the norm, its believers were more “ grounded and in touch with real life” than religions that value individualism (qtd. in Hallar).

Challenges faced by Ecuadorian Muslims

Converting to Islam poses several challenges. First, because Islam is a way of life and not merely a religion, converts brace with the difficulty of adjusting their once decadent lifestyle to suit the tenets of modesty and economy in Islam. Young converts expressed “ not being ready to give up parties” as a great challenge for them (qtd. in Rich). For most women converts, the stereotypes that are often attached to Islam and Muslims became a great hindrance for them as they strived to be accepted by the Catholic families. Native Ecuadorian Muslims comprise more than half of the population of Muslims in Ecuador. Their understanding of the religion is best reflected in their manner of dressing. Almost all of the females don the hijab and long dress daily. A main issue for women converts is the mode of dress.

Muslim women are required to wear the appropriate clothing, usually the headscarf or hijab. Many Catholics view wearing the hijab as an oppressive act and do not understand its need. The younger generation of Muslim converts in Ecuador is also looking forward to a more progressive Islam – one that is keeping up with the times but does not run contrary to the fundamental teachings of Islam and the values of the Islamic civilization itself (Sesin).

Integration with a predominantly Catholic population has also subjected a few Muslims in Ecuador to harassment and discrimination. In a UN Commission on Human Rights Report, Muslim leaders alleged that Ecuadorian Muslims encountered discrimination when they apply for employment, loans, or housing. However, due to the small population of Muslims in Ecuador, discrimination is not societal and does not occur frequently (UN Commission on Human Rights).

After 9/11, Muslims in Ecuador have also gone under careful scrutiny by the public and have been associated with terrorism. Concern on terrorist infiltration in Ecuador is low but it is still a concern that may have a detrimental impact on its Muslim population. The connections of the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah is strong in several Latin American countries, and the sizable presence of Lebanese immigrants in Ecuador has made American and Ecuadorian authorities suspicious nevertheless. Islamic proselytism among native Indian populations have been viewed as an act that could allow militant preachers or activists to agitate people into supporting terror acts and groups (UN Commission on Human Rights).

As a religious group, Ecuadorian Muslims have also faced challenges that threaten their presence and existence as devout Muslims with a distinct way of life and culture. The following are some of the difficulties that the Ecuadorian Muslim community faces (Hallar):

1. There is a lack of public awareness about the Islamic religion and way of life in general that may account for the discrimination that some experience as a result of their religious affiliation.

2. Maintaining a separate Islamic identity is troublesome and difficult for many believers. Many Ecuadorians practice Islam randomly and without a thorough understanding of Islam and its values, traditions, and principles. This is problematic for many converts because they are unable to develop and maintain a new identity as Muslims. Due to this crisis, they retain the traditions of the old religion and absorb the practices of the dominant culture which contradict Islam.

3. There is a scarcity of Islamic schools or madrasah and access to teachers who can provide adequate instruction on the Arabic language. Learning Arabic is crucial to the Islamic faith because the holy texts such as Qur'an and the hadiths are all written in Arabic. Well-off Ecuadorians are able to send their children abroad in Egypt or in Libya to acquire formal instruction in Islamic Studies and Arabic but those who cannot afford such an education have difficulty learning.

4. The lack of financial resources also hamper with the objectives of Muslim religious organizations in building masjids, facilities for schooling, and

acquisition of religious texts to further Islamic education among Muslim youth and children.

5. There is also a lack of religious preachers who are able to speak Spanish and literate of the traditions and culture of Ecuador to be able to effectively spread the Daw'ah. Islamic proselytizing is less effective when preachers are unable to speak the language and to adapt to cultural practices.

8. There is also a lack of Islamic secondary schools to help Muslim youth and adolescents develop a solid Islamic identity. Educational resources available in mainstream school do not account for the historical contributions of Muslims in the Latin American continent. Misconceptions about Islam and Muslims are not adequately dispelled and resolved.

9. There is a lack of religious texts that are not translated into Spanish. This makes it difficult for converts to adequately understand and study by themselves the principles that Islam adheres to.

10. Coordination among different Muslim religious organizations is also hampered because of geographical differences which take ample amount of economic resources. There is a need to develop extensive networks within the Muslim population in Ecuador.

11. There are few opportunities for Muslims around the country to convene at confer