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The Lakemba Mosque, also known as the Masjid Ali Bin Abi Talib^[1] and officially the Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque,^[2] is Australia's largest mosque.^[3] It was the first purpose-built mosque in Sydney and is located at 71-75 Wangee Road, Lakemba. Owned and managed by the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA),^[4] Lakemba Mosque and the LMA offices are situated contiguously at the same address.

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History[edit]

A small house on the current site of Lakemba Mosque was purchased and used by the Lebanese Muslim Association from the 1960s as a place of worship. The house was demolished in the early 1970s and construction of the current building commenced. Construction lasted five years, with the mosque being completed in 1977.[5] The opening of the mosque was attended by the former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Fundraising for the mosque took place both locally and internationally, with about half the funds coming from the Middle East and the largest single donation coming from the Saudi royal family.[6] Lakemba Mosque was the second purpose-built mosque in Sydney and remains arguably Australia's most well-known and important mosque.

While historically Muslims of Lebanese heritage constituted the majority of the congregation, today people of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and South-East Asian backgrounds are also of significant numbers, along with a small but growing number of converts. The overwhelming majority of the congregation is either of Hanafi or Shafi'i background.

Controversies[edit]

Taj El-Din Hilaly[edit]

Taj El-Din Hilaly, the former Imam of Lakemba Mosque till 2007 (whose wages were paid by Gaddafi's Libyan Islamic Call Society and private individuals"[7][8]) is known to have made numerous controversial statements.

1988 speech regarding Jews[edit]

In 1988 when Hilaly delivered a lecture to a group of Muslim students at University of Sydney on the topic "The Disposition of Jews in the light of the Qur'an." He was quoted as saying:

"The Jews' struggle with humanity is as old as history itself; the present continuing struggle with the Islam nation is a natural continuation of the Jews' enmity towards the human race as a whole. Judaism controls the world by...secret movements as the destructive doctrines and groups, such as communism, libertarianism, Free Masons, Bahá'ism, the Rotary clubs, the nationalistic and racist doctrines. The Jews try to control the world through sex, then sexual perversion, then the promotion of espionage, treason, and economic hoarding."[9][10]

Hilaly has not since apologised nor retracted his comments, in which he accused Jews of "causing all wars." [11]

February 2004 sermon[edit]

In February 2004 Hilaly gave a sermon at a mosque in Sidon, Lebanon, whilst overseas the

text of which was translated by the Australian Embassy in Beirut. It appeared to show him supporting terrorist attacks. In his sermon, Hilaly said:

Sons of Islam, there is a war of infidels taking place everywhere. The true man is the boy who opposes Israeli tanks with strength and faith. The boy who, despite his mother's objections, goes out to war to become a martyr like his elder brother. The boy who tells his mother: 'Oh mother, don't cry for me if I die. Oh mother, Jihad has been imposed on me and I want to become a martyr'." 11 September is God's work against oppressors. Some of the things that happen in the world cannot be explained; a civilian airplane whose secrets cannot be explained if we ask its pilot who reached his objective without error, who led your steps? Or if we ask the giant that fell, who humiliated you? Or if we ask the President, who made you cry? God is the answer.

— Taj El-Din Hilaly[12]

In his speech, he also predicted that Muslims would control the White House and appeared to support Hezbollah.[12][13] The Australian Federal Police declined to investigate his activities overseas.

2006 Holocaust denial[edit]

In July 2006 Hilaly was sacked from Prime Minister of Australia John Howard's Muslim Community Reference Group following comments he made in which he denied the Holocaust, calling it a "Zionist lie". He also referred to Israel as a "cancer". This prompted calls for legal action to be pursued against him in a country which has the highest per-capita number of Holocaust survivors in the world outside Israel.[14]

October 2006 sermon[edit]

In October 2006, Hilaly delivered a Ramadan sermon in Arabic in which he made statements concerning female clothing which proved highly controversial. The key part of these was:

If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park, or in the backyard without a cover, and the cats come and eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats' or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem. If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred."

— Taj El-Din Hilaly[15][16]

He also said, "in the state of zina, the responsibility falls 90 per cent of the time on the woman. Why? Because she possesses the weapon of enticement (igraa)."[17] Hilaly later claimed that he had intended to suggest that "if a woman who shows herself off, she is to blame...but a man should be able to control himself." He also contended that his references to the prison sentence of Bilal Skaf, the leader of a group of Lebanese Australians who committed gang rapes in Sydney in 2000, in which he said that women would "sway suggestively" before men "and then you get a judge without mercy (rahma) and gives you 65 years", were aimed at illustrating the need for harsh sanctions for rape.[17]

There was a significant backlash to Hilaly's comments.

Alleged link to Al-Qaeda[edit]

In February 2009, a Sydney Morning Herald journalist was ejected from the Lakemba mosque and the newspaper later reported that Anwar al-Awlaki, a key organizer, recruiter and spiritual motivator for the Islamist terrorist group al-Qaeda, spoke via phone link. A

director of the mosque said that Shady Alsuleiman was in charge of organising evening youth events at the time of the sermon.[18]

[Alleged sectarianism](#)^[edit]

In March 2015, adjunct professor Clive Williams at Macquarie University's Centre for Policing, Intelligence & Counter Terrorism wrote that Sunni Muslims did not welcome Shia Muslims at the mosque.[19]

[Christmas controversy](#)^[edit]

In late 2012 Shaykh Safi told the congregation, during prayers, that they should not take part in anything to do with Christmas. A fatwa warned that, "disbelievers are trying to draw Muslims away from the straight path". The Grand Mufti of Australia, Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, said these views did not represent the majority of Muslims in Australia.[20] Keysar Trad, former director[21] and president[22] of the LMA, said they previously greeted people with Merry Christmas, "I don't know what has changed." [20]

[Mosque personnel](#)^[edit]

Lakemba Mosque has a number of staff who assist in the running and maintenance of the mosque. Currently the mosque has three official Imams:

The Imam of Lakemba Mosque is Shaykh Yahya Safi, who worked as an Imam in Lebanon before his appointment at the Lakemba Mosque in 1996.[23] Shaykh Yahya gives the khutbah every fortnight, unless there is a visiting Shaykh from overseas.

The assistant Imam as of 2016 is Shaykh Mohammed Gomaa from Egypt. Shaykh Gomaa is a bilingual Imam who was trained at Egypt's prestigious Al-Azhar University. He specialises in Qur'anic Commentary and alternates in giving the Friday sermon each fortnight.

The deputy assistant Imam, as of 2015, is Shaykh Mohamed Harby. Shaykh Mohamed is a qāri' from Egypt who specialises in the sciences of Qur'an which he teaches at an advanced level to students at the Lebanese Muslim Association.^[citation needed]

Due its influence and significance, the mosque regularly hosts and is a first stop for visiting Islamic scholars from overseas.

[Activities](#)^[edit]

The mosque offers a number of religious classes, such as in Prophetic biography, Fiqh and Aqidah. The mosque gives a platform to a number of local Shaykhs to speak and teach, such as Shaykh Wesam Charkawi.[24][25] Since 2014, the mosque has served as the centre of the National Mosque Open Day event.

Several thousand worshippers normally attend weekly prayers on Fridays.[26] In 2015 around 30,000 worshippers attended Eid prayers at the mosque and in the road outside, making it one of Australia's largest eid celebrations.[27] In 2016, an estimated 40,000-50,000 attended Eid prayers.[28][29][30][31]

[See also](#)^[edit]

[Islam portal](#)

[Islam in Australia](#)

[Islamic schools and branches](#)

[List of mosques in Oceania](#)