



DECEMBER 16 2007

## HAJJ

### **Record number of pilgrims flock to Saudi Arabia**

The annual Hajj pilgrimage drew to a close last week, following a season in which a record number of pilgrims traveled to Saudi Arabia.

A total of 1,729,841 pilgrims arrived in the Kingdom from 178 countries, an increase of 18,026 from the previous year and a new Hajj record.

According to figures released by the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC a total of 11,801 visas for the 1429 (2008) Hajj were issued at Saudi consulates in the United States.

### **Eid Al-Adha is observed**

Eid Al-Adha, the holiday that marks the end of the Hajj season, began December 8.

In Makkah, the imam of the Grand Mosque, Shaikh Saleh Al-Talib, called on Muslims to be more tolerant of others during his December 9 sermon marking the holiday. "The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent as Mercy to all – Muslims and non-Muslims," he said. "He used to visit sick Jews and answer their invitations. He was kind to animals, birds and even to inanimate things."

In Washington, DC, Saudi Ambassador to the United States Adel A. Al-Jubeir hosted Eid Al-Adha prayers at the Saudi Embassy on December 8. After the prayers the Ambassador hosted a breakfast for the guests, which included Embassy staff, members of the Saudi community, representatives of the Saudi armed forces and Saudi students.

### **Hajj Minister meets U.S. Congressman Keith Ellison**

Minister of Hajj Dr. Fouad Al-Farsi met in Jeddah on December 13 with US Congressman Keith Ellison of Minnesota. Ellison, the first Muslim elected

to the U.S. House of Representatives, traveled to Saudi Arabia to perform his first Hajj pilgrimage. During the meeting, Ellison expressed thanks and appreciation to King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan for the care and attention given to the American pilgrims who performed the Hajj this year. He also commended the extensive improvement projects at the Holy sites.

## ISLAM

### **King Abdullah urges dialogue between Muslims**

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz called on the Muslim Ummah (community) to initiate a dialogue in order to unify the standing of Muslims in the world and to eradicate extremism and violent ideologies.

Speaking to heads of states and heads of Hajj missions in Mina on December 9, King Abdullah reflected on the hope of the late King Abdulaziz, founder of modern Saudi Arabia, to see a united Muslim Ummah inspired by the unity and equality of the faithful during Hajj.

“Last Hajj, I spoke with you about the importance of interfaith dialogue,” said King Abdullah, who praised the successful, high-level dialogue conferences that were subsequently held in Makkah, Madrid and New York. “The objective of this interfaith dialogue, which was initiated by your brothers in the Kingdom, is to strengthen the pride of Islam and serve humanity.”

King Abdullah declared, “Today we are in need of dialogue within the Muslim Ummah itself.” He noted that “division, ignorance, and extremism are obstacles threatening the hopes of Muslims.”

The King added, “Terrorism is threatening the world and it is attributed to Muslims alone because of the actions of a few extremists who represent none but themselves. Though they put on the guise of Islam, the religion is innocent and not responsible for their acts. This makes dialogue among the Muslim Ummah necessary to unify the ranks, bolster moderation, remove the causes of conflict and eradicate extremism.”

