Muslim Inventions Shine in New York

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The exhibition highlights Muslim achievements and inventions in different fields of science. (NY Times photo)

CAIRO – An exhibition displaying Muslim inventions and achievements in different fields of science has made its way to New York city amid hopes of correcting the American public's view about Muslims.

"[Queens was] the logical place for telling this story," Margaret Honey, president and chief executive of The New York Hall of Science, told *The New York Times* Tuesday, December 7.

The "1001 Inventions" exhibition, which opened in the weekend, highlights contributions by Muslim scholars to the development of astronomy, math, architecture, medicine and engineering.

It features exhibits spanning from Muslin thinkers in different fields of medicine, optics, mathematics, astronomy, higher education, library science, personal hygiene and even the basics of aviation.

It also shows the works of some of history's finest scientists and scholars who once extended from Spain to China and lightened the world from the seventh century.

For example, at the 13th-century observatory in Maragha, Iran, astrologists developed new models for understanding the universe which helped pave the way for Copernicus' ideas of a sun-centered solar system in 1543.

Abbas Bin Firnas, a ninth-century scholar, also performed one of the first recorded human flights when he leapt from the minaret of the Grand Mosque in Cordoba using a glider stiffened with wooden struts.

Iraqi physician Ali Ibn Nafi is also credited for inventing the diagram of the human circulatory system in 1242 CE and being the first to have accurately described the part of the cardiovascular system involving the heart and lungs.

The exhibit also shows the 12th century Syrian engineer Ibn Ismail al-Jazari who invented the double-action suction pump, and his contemporary Al-Idrisi who drew up a world map centuries before Columbus and Marco Polo set off exploring.

"We started a long time before all this," Salim T. S. al-Hassani, the creator of the exhibition and a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Manchester in Britain, told The *NY Times*.

The exhibition has earlier made successful tours in London and Istanbul.

New York is home to some 800,000 Muslims, about 10 percent of the city's population.

There are about 100 mosques throughout New York's five boroughs.

The United States is home to an estimated Muslim minority of six to eight million.

Muslim Image

Sponsors hope that the exhibition would send a message to the Western world about the Muslim scientific advancements.

"[Discoveries made in Islamic societies provided] the continuity, the smooth graph, of how ideas travel in humanity," Prof. Hassani said.

He said that the event is also meant to correct wrong ideas about the sudden rise of the Renaissance age in Europe without any Muslim contributions.

"[This notion] defies logic," he said.

The exhibition has also another mission; changing the view of the American public about Muslims following the uproar over a planned mosque near the site of the 9/11 attacks.

"I do think in light of all the controversy over the mosque, and with the news continuing to proliferate with disturbing information about people of Muslim background, that we can benefit from a shift in perspective," Honey said.

The mosque, championed by the Cordoba Foundation, has stirred a heated national debate, with opponents argue that the planned building would be an insult to the memory of the 9/11 victims.

Advocates say that the center, which would include a mosque, a swimming pool, a preschool and a 9/11 memorial, would send a message of tolerance in 9/11-post America.

The controversy has fuelled anti-Muslim sentiments across the United States, with a spree of attacks on Muslim worship places and property.

The debate was seized by rightists and politicians to step up inflammatory rhetoric against Muslims, and exposed a raw nerve over US attitudes toward Islam nearly nine years after the 9/11 attacks.