

# Muslim Philanthropy in Brazil: Interviews with Philanthropists in São Paulo

**Malika Kettani, Ph.D.**

*University Euromed of Fes*

## Abstract

*The main purpose of these interviews is to explore the development of Muslim philanthropy in Brazil as well as the role of dawah and its relation to philanthropy. The interviews deal with specific terms such as zakat, fitra, sadaqah, and waqf to explore how they are interpreted and applied in Latin American contexts. The interviews were conducted with the person in charge of Centro de Divulgação do Islam para América Latina (CDIAL, Center for the Promotion of Islam in Latin America) and the director of affairs at Al-Madina School in São Bernardo, São Paulo, Brazil. This paper also provides some perspective on how the Brazilian government provides facilities for Islamic institutions, the way Muslim nonprofit organizations spend their zakat, and how they manage to help others in Brazilian civil society. Both through interviews and the author's personal involvement, this paper offers multiple first-person accounts of Muslim philanthropy in Brazil.*

**Keywords:** *Philanthropy, Brazil, dawah, zakat*

## Introduction

Charity, known as *zakat*, is the third pillar of Islamic religious practices (*arkan al-din/al-Islam*). Zakat is considered an obligatory act of worship, which requires every Muslim who owns wealth greater than, or equal to, a predefined limit or value (*nisab*), to donate approximately 2.5% of that wealth to people in need. Amounts smaller than the *nisab* are not subject to the payment of alms. The *nisab* has two basic conditions. First, it has to be in excess of the urgent, or basic, needs for a Muslim, such as food, clothing, accommodation, vehicles, and tools for a Muslim's respective craft. Second, the *nisab* is typically measured over a specific period, often a lunar year, to account for any fluctuations in wealth throughout that period. This is due to interpretations of the *hadith* of Aisha, where she is supposed to have said: "There is no zakat on money until the year has passed on it." Beyond this condition, there is the *zakat* of crops and fruits; where *zakat* is due on the day it is harvested; (He is the One Who produces gardens both cultivated and wild and palm trees, crops of different flavors, olives, and pomegranates similar "in shape,"

but dissimilar “in taste.” Eat of the fruit they bear and pay the dues at harvest, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful) (*Qur’an* 6:141).

For Muslims, *zakat* is meant to serve as a means to reduce poverty, bridge the wealth gap, and promote solidarity and compassion among Muslims. It is also considered a way to purify one’s wealth and seek blessings from Allah. Many Muslims give *zakat* during the Islamic month of Ramadan, as it is believed to be a time of increased blessings and rewards. Moreover, *zakat* is different from other forms of voluntary charity, known as *sadaqah*. While *zakat* has specific rules and criteria, *sadaqah* refers to any form of voluntary giving or acts of kindness, apart from the obligatory *zakat*. Both are a significant aspect of Islamic financial practice and play crucial roles in shaping Muslim communities and societies. The intention of both *sadaqah* and *zakat* is to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth between believers and to foster a sense of social responsibility and compassion.

### **Muslim Philanthropic Infrastructure in Brazil**

Among Muslims in Brazil, philanthropy is widespread in multiple sectors of civil society: in education, culture, food, as well as for and among impoverished communities. For example, there are numerous Islamic schools and institutions built by philanthropists from Middle Eastern countries, like Kuwait or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Immigrants and their descendants in Brazil have played a significant role in constructing its Muslim philanthropic infrastructure, being responsible for 120 institutions in São Paulo alone. These institutions include Islamic centers, religious associations, and charitable organizations. Some institutions have grown and developed, while others have remained relatively small. The same applies to Arabic-Islamic magazines (publications) and schools.

Support and subsidies from abroad, thanks to the maintenance of relations by the Islamic community in Brazil with Arab countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, have brought collaboration and funding for mosques and Islamic centers in Brazil. While these institutions have received support from local community members, they also have relied on external donations from Saudi Arabia, the Islamic World League based in Mecca, and the support and assistance of the Brazilian government itself.<sup>45</sup>

Many imams are selected, trained, and sent by Arab governments to serve in South American countries such as Brazil. One example is Ismail Hatia, a South African who arrived in Brazil in 1956. He built a mosque in Campinas and also ran a language school. When Hatia settled in Campinas, there were 50 Muslim families in desperate need of a community organization to help them practice their faith. Currently, the Campinas mosque has well-organized weekly sermons every Friday. Another example is Ahmed Sale Al-Muhayri. In 1974, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Dawah in Saudi Arabia sent Al-Muhayri as a *da’ia* (missionary) to the

---

<sup>45</sup> See <https://cdial.org.br/acao-social-islamica-na-periferia-de-sao-bernardo-do-campo/>.

state of Paraná in Londrina. He founded the King Faisal Mosque and wrote several works in Portuguese and Spanish.

### **Early Philanthropic Initiatives in Brazil**

In 1987, Islamic cultural work in Brazil took a significant leap when the Lebanese immigrant Ahmed Ali Saifi founded the Center for Islamic Dawah in Latin America (CDIAL). Saifi's initiative originated from the creation of the Muslim Youth Movement in 1965, along with a group of his friends. After more than a decade of dedication and work, around 1977, Mr. Saifi assumed the leadership of the Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana de São Paulo.

In 1978, with the support of the Muslim Youth Movement, the Abu Bakr Al Sidik Association was founded with the aim of representing and engaging the growing Islamic community in Brazil and Latin America. It also sought to promote religion through social activities, camps, classes, and international seminars that involved members from across the continent. The association provided books, pamphlets, and promotional materials in Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic to these communities, as well as the construction of mosques around the country. It has organized an annual international congress since 1981.

Another significant moment in the development of Islamic cultural work in Brazil was in 1979, when Lebanese immigrant Hossain El Zogbi founded the Union of Islamic Institutions in Brazil, a process that took place with the approval and endorsement of the Islamic World League in addition to several Muslim-majority countries' embassies. This organization managed to secure financial support for the construction of more than 30 mosques in various parts of Brazil and bring *du'at* (Islamic preachers) through the support of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in Egypt, the Islamic World League, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in Saudi Arabia.

Ali Kettani (related to the author) also played a role, as an expert on Islamic minorities and advisor to the Islamic World League (*Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami*), as well as a professor at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He visited Brazil several times to meet with Muslim leaders there.<sup>46</sup> During his first visit from December 18 to 25, 1974, as a delegate of the Muslim World League to the Muslim community in South America, Kettani discussed with the leaders the means necessary for organization and encouraged them to form a federation and establish ties with the descendants of other immigrants from Spain, Africa, and/or Syria. He then visited the states of Rio de Janeiro, the Federal District of Brasilia, and Paraná (Curitiba, Londrina, Paranagua).

Professor Kettani also pursued *dawah* in non-majority Muslim countries more broadly. He began his involvement in this field since his entry into the University of Lausanne, Switzerland and later in the United States. He established several Islamic centers through which he aimed to promote Islamic teachings. Upon settling in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, he was appointed as an advisor to the

---

<sup>46</sup> See the attached annexes

Muslim World League in Mecca. He proposed to them to conduct a comprehensive survey of Muslim minorities worldwide. The first work he classified in this regard was the book “Muslims in the Communist Camp.” In 1973, he conducted a general survey of the number of Muslims in Europe and the Americas on behalf of the Muslim World League. This resulted in the publication of several reports, including “Muslims in Europe and America” in two volumes, and “Muslim Minorities in The World Today” in English (with an abridged version in Arabic). (See Appendices 1 and 2)

As part of his efforts to preserve the Islamic presence in the West and spread Islamic teachings, Ali Kettani also participated in training and development courses for leaders and preachers organized in various universities and Islamic centers around the world, including Malaysia, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, and the Netherlands. One notable organization that hosted such events was the “Dawah Academy,” an offshoot of the Islamia University of Islamabad in Pakistan. Hundreds of preachers from different countries graduated under his guidance. Additionally, he played a key role in organizing Islamic associations in Australia under the name of the “Union of Islamic Associations in Australia,” which now comprises over 800,000 Muslims. The number of people who embraced Islam through his efforts or influence surpasses calculation.

Beyond the efforts of individuals, charitable societies played an important role in the development of Brazil’s Muslim philanthropic infrastructure. The first Islamic Benevolent Association in São Paulo was inaugurated in 1929, along with a mosque, the first in Latin America. It was after World War II that the construction of this mosque began in 1952. It was initially called the Muslim Benevolent Society in Rio de Janeiro, founded in 1951 by a group of immigrants on a 40m<sup>2</sup> area in the city center. Serious supervision began in 1956 when the Islamic Congress in Cairo sent a delegation headed by Abdulllah Abdulshakur Kamel. At that time, there were 14 Islamic institutions in Brazil, with the majority located in São Paulo, Brazil’s economic capital and thus, an important hub for migrants seeking economic security and business opportunities. Prior to 1956, there were only three weekly active Islamic associations. That was until contact was established with the Islamic Congress institution in Cairo, resulting in the formation of an additional 14 Islamic institutions.

To acknowledge and reward these Islamic activities and efforts, the first Islamic congress of Islamic institutions in Brazil and Latin America was held in São Paulo in September 1970. The congress was attended by various delegations and representatives from Islamic institutions in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela, as well as official delegations representing the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Iran. The congress produced several recommendations, including the formation of an Islamic Council to guide the Islamic movement in Brazil and Latin America, since they considered Brazil the strongest center of Islamic activity on the continent.

Later, on December 19, 1979, the Federation of Muslim Associations of Brazil (FAMBRAS) was founded during an assembly held in Brasília. Representatives of significant Muslim associations in Brazil attended and expressed full support. The main leader and organizer of FAMBRAS was Hayy Hussein Mohamed El-Zoghbi. Actually, FAMBRAS and CDIAL are the most important Islamic entities in Brazil.

Between February 1 and 10, 1981, a camp for young Muslims took place

about 60 kilometers between São Paulo and Campinas. It was attended by the mayor of São Paulo, government officials, leaders of the Muslim community in Brazil, the Secretary-General of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), as well as speakers from North America and Saudi Arabia (i.e., Islamic University of Medina), and other participants. A total of 140 young people and students from Muslim societies and communities in South and Central America participated. The governor of São Paulo at that time, Paulo Salim Maluf, of Lebanese Christian origin, showed his sympathy for organizing the camp by providing transportation and a meal in honor of the participants.

Muslims could also be found in Rio de Janeiro, Brasília (the country’s capital), Paranaguá, Santa Catarina, Campinas, Cuiabá, and Foz do Iguaçu. Some imams were sent and supported by Dar al Ifta’*e* in Riyadh or the Rabitat Al Alam Al Islami (the League of Islamic World) in Mecca. The number of mosques built up until 1981 totaled 10 and were located in São Paulo, Curitiba, Londrina, Paranaguá, Brasília, Guaíba, Barretos, Jundiaí, Campinas, and Guarapuava. The number of mosques and *mussalas* (prayer halls) has grown by 20% since 2015, driven by the arrival of refugees and the ongoing conversion of Brazilians to Islam in the last decade.

Based on data provided from Ali Kettani’s personal research (from the years 1956 to 1981) and the Atlas of the latest demographic census of 2010 in Brazil,<sup>47</sup> it is evident that the establishment of Islamic institutions in Brazil experienced a significant increase since 1981, with notable growth between 2005 and 2010.

Below is a table that demonstrates the increase in the number of Islamic institutions in Brazil over the last seven decades:

Year	1956	1979	1981	2005	2010	2016
<b>Number of institutions</b>	14	24	27	70	115	127

Breaking these numbers down further by region, we can note that during the first period (1951–1958), the Islamic Club of Brazil was founded in 1956 in São Paulo, followed by the Muslim Benevolent Association of Paraná in Curitiba in 1957. In 1991, the Southeast region had the highest concentration with 25 associations, particularly in the state of São Paulo. Muslims in the Southeast region began organizing themselves in the early 1960s, with a total of eight associations, especially in the regions of Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul (three associations in each). The Southeast is followed in concentration by the southern region with 14 associations, particularly in the state of Paraná, where Muslim presence can be traced back to 1950. Later, in the 1970s, Muslims in the northern region had two associations, while in 1980, the Northeast region stood out with two additional associations. The organization of Muslims started initially in all regions of Brazil and

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.ibge.gov.br/geociencias/cartas-e-mapas/mapas-municipais/27440-mapas-municipais-pa-ra-fins-estatisticos.html?edicao=27441&t=acesso-ao-produto>.

later expanded to additional states. Speaking specifically about Bahia, the Islamic Center of Bahia (CIB) was founded in February 1991, thanks to the historian Cid Teixeira (1924–2021), a specialist in the history of the Malês, through a delegation from São Paulo that established contact with him. Its president is Nigerian migrant Ahmad Abdul Hameed, who has been leading the community since 1992.

It is worth noting the Summaya Bint Khayyat Mosque, founded in 2012. It is the former Mussala Ar-Rahmah located in the small municipality of Embu das Artes in São Paulo. This *mussala* was the initiative of Brazilian Muslim César Kaab Abdul, who dedicated a small part of his own house to gather Muslims living in the area and perform *salat*, as there is no mosque nearby, and the nearest one is a three-hour drive away. The mosque today is an extension of this same *mussala*, still located in Kaab's house. What sets this mosque apart and makes it unique is that it is the first and only mosque in Brazil located in a peripheral area, Embu das Artes, a municipality of São Paulo. Its main mission is to spread *dawah* in the streets of São Paulo and its peripheries.

In summary, Islamic charitable societies are present throughout Brazil, with the largest concentration of Muslims in São Paulo, Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Rio Grande do Sul, and Foz do Iguaçu. We will now detail the names of the religious institutions that are also responsible for leading the mosques, the work of these mosques, and their role within the Islamic community and Brazilian society as a whole.

### **List of Islamic Charitable Societies and Islamic Cultural Centers in Brazil**

#### ***SBMRJ***

The Muslim Charitable Society of Rio de Janeiro (Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana do Rio de Janeiro), was founded on January 1, 1951, by a group of immigrants who gathered to perform *salat al-jumu'ah* (Friday prayer). Initially, its activities were limited to prayer and Islamic rituals like marriages and funerals. SBMRJ was declared a Public Utility by Law 3765 on June 3, 2004. It consists of the following departments: education, welfare and social work, financials, and women's work. The role of Muslim women is visibly present in SBMRJ. According to fieldwork conducted by Silvia Montenegro, the association's secretariat is managed by a woman around 60 years old, of Arab descent, who converted to Islam four years ago (Benlebhah & Montenegro, 2013). In fact, SBMRJ served as the prototype for grassroots Islamic organizations, followed by all subsequently created Islamic organizations. However, after the Six-Day War in 1967 and the discrediting of the Nasserite model of Arab nationalism (led by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser), even the SBMSP (Muslim Charitable Society of São Paulo, or Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana do São Paulo) followed the SBMRJ model. The latter represented the best means of building a Muslim community from the grassroots level (the individual) to the highest level (the national Muslim organization representing all Brazilian Muslims). The SBMRJ website<sup>48</sup> includes

---

<sup>48</sup> See <https://sbmrj.org.br/>.

various sections covering the definition of Islam and its pillars, the Quran and its precepts, women in Islam, the history of Islam, and a virtual library that allows free book downloads (a total of 13 books). It is worth emphasizing that in 2015, a new plot of land measuring 525m<sup>2</sup> was acquired to build a new center and meet the needs of the growing Muslim community. Specifically, on December 17, 2015, state approval was obtained for the construction of an Islamic cemetery in Itapecerica, covering an area of 60,000m<sup>2</sup>.

### **FAMBRAS**

The Federation of Muslim Associations in Brazil (Federação das Associações Muçulmanas do Brasil) was founded in 1979 by Hussein El Zoghbi as a Muslim association that supports the creation of an entity aimed at strengthening the unification of various Islamic institutions in Brazil. FAMBRAS was the first institution to introduce the concept of *halal* certification in the country. In 1981, FAMBRAS began to structure Brazil's *halal* market. Today, Brazil is the largest exporter of *halal* meat in the world.<sup>49</sup>

### **CCBI**

CCBI the Cultural and Beneficial Islamic Center of Foz do Iguaçu (Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico de Foz do Iguaçu). The construction of the Foz do Iguaçu Mosque (Omar Ibn Al Jattab) began in 1981 when the cornerstone was laid. It was inaugurated two years later in 1983. The mosque is known for its beauty and is open to both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors who can visit the mosque during designated visiting hours. Interestingly, the city's tourist guide, published by the tourism office, includes a visit to this mosque in its suggested itineraries.

CCBI receives periodic donations from *Jornal do Libano*, a digital newspaper covering issues in Lebanon and Brazil in Portuguese.<sup>50</sup> In 2022 the cultural center received a donation of 40,000 medicines from the *Jornal*. The donation from Atef Manah and Ali Tiba marks a series of donations that the newspaper will make to Lebanese communities in Brazil. Each donation will bear the name of a Lebanese individual who stood out within the community. Donations for Lebanon is coordinated with the Lebanese diplomatic corps in Brasília. The donation had a symbolic handover, and shortly after, the boxes were sent to the Health Department and will be distributed for public healthcare at the city's,<sup>39</sup> Health Units and the Municipal Hospital Padre Germano Lauck. Atef Manah and Ali Tiba were known for their work not only within the Lebanese community but also for helping all those in need. The name of the donation was chosen based on the legacy left by these two Lebanese individuals.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ali Saifi, CEO of CDIAL Halal was published in <https://magazinebbm.com/blog/brazil-is-the-biggest-halal-food-supplier-in-all-over-the-world-2266>.

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.jornaldolibano.com.br>.

<sup>51</sup> See [https://www.mesquitafoz.com.br/solidariedade\\_libanesa](https://www.mesquitafoz.com.br/solidariedade_libanesa).

**LJIBB**

The Beneficent Islamic Youth League of Brazil (Liga da Juventude Islâmica Beneficente do Brasil) was founded on January 12, 1995, with its headquarters in São Paulo. The Beneficent Islamic Youth League Pari Mosque is a nonprofit civil organization that operates in the religious field. It has individual members of various nationalities (as stated on the homepage).<sup>52</sup> Its president is Ali Mohamed Abdouni. The LJIBB works to disseminate the concepts of Islam, consolidate Islamic religious values, foster an Islamic personality that contributes to the development of Islam in Brazil, provide humanitarian aid and social assistance to those in need and in difficult situations, seek solutions to social problems such as alcoholism and drug addiction, and elevate the cultural and social level of its members. The board of directors from 2013 to 2015 consisted of nine members, all of Arab origin, and three *shuyukh* (Islamic scholars), one of whom was of African origin named Juma Momade. Among the philanthropy actions of LJIBB, they distributed basic food baskets in the Canindé Community<sup>53</sup> and organized the Islamic Book Fair.<sup>54</sup>

**UNI**

UNI Refers to the National Union of Islam (União Nacional Islâmica) and is headquartered in São Paulo, in the Bras neighborhood. It was founded in 2005 by a group of combined Islamic entities in Brazil, and its president is Yamal el Bacha, who is of Lebanese origin. The UNI is the largest Islamic organization in Brazil and has 15 associated groups.<sup>55</sup> The institution carries out its work through its associated entities and has a consistent presence in social activities such as community actions, dissemination of Islam, celebration of Islamic religious days, education, guidance, and support for Brazilian youth who have converted to Islam.

<sup>52</sup> See <http://www.ligaislamica.org.br/>.

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.ligaislamica.org.br/galeria\\_liga\\_islamica/2010.09.18\\_distribuicao\\_cestas\\_comunidade\\_caninde/liga\\_islamica\\_galeria\\_cestas\\_basicas.htm](http://www.ligaislamica.org.br/galeria_liga_islamica/2010.09.18_distribuicao_cestas_comunidade_caninde/liga_islamica_galeria_cestas_basicas.htm).

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.ligaislamica.org.br/galeria\\_liga\\_islamica/2009.07.25\\_primeira\\_feira\\_livro\\_islamico/liga\\_islamica\\_galeria\\_feira\\_livro01.htm](http://www.ligaislamica.org.br/galeria_liga_islamica/2009.07.25_primeira_feira_livro_islamico/liga_islamica_galeria_feira_livro01.htm).

<sup>55</sup> The 15 associated identities are

1. Associação Recreativo e Cultural Islâmica de São Miguel Paulista - SP
2. Centro de Divulgação do Islã para a América Latina
3. Conselho Superior dos Teólogos e Assuntos Islâmicos do Brasil
4. Liga da Juventude Islâmica Beneficente do Brasil
5. Sociedade Beneficente Islâmica do Litoral Paulista
6. Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana de Santo Amaro
7. Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana de São José dos Campos
8. Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana de Taubaté - SP
9. Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana dos Membros da Confraria Chaizulia Yachrutia
10. Sociedade Cultural e Beneficente Islâmica de Mogi das Cruzes
11. Sociedade Islâmica Brasileira de Guarulhos - SP
12. Sociedade Islâmica de Campinas
13. WAMY- Assembléia Mundial da Juventude Islâmica
14. Associação Islâmica de São Paulo
15. Sociedade Islâmica de Beneficência Abu Baker Assadik.

***CDIAL***

The Center for the Dissemination of Islam in Latin America (Centro de Divulgación del Islam para América Latina) is led by its president, Ahmad Ali Saifi, who is of Lebanese origin. Its headquarters are located in San Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo. The CDIAL is a charitable, independent, cultural, and social Islamic foundation that works to disseminate knowledge about Islam and aims to present the true Islam to non-Muslims. The CDIAL focuses on teaching the Arabic language, as well as Quranic studies and the dissemination of Islam.

***WAMY***

The World Assembly of Muslim Youth is a nongovernmental organization established in 1973, with its headquarters in Saudi Arabia. The Brazilian chapter of WAMY organizes seminars for Brazilian converts and serves Islamic youth in particular. It also organizes a range of social, cultural, and educational programs (see above, for example).

***ILAEI***

The Latin American Institute of Islamic Studies (Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Islámicos) was founded on May 15, 2008, at the headquarters of the Islamic Charitable Society in Maringa. Its website is available in three languages: Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese. The Latin American Institute of Islamic Studies is an institution dedicated to the teaching of Islamic Sciences, both at its headquarters and beyond. Its aim is to train prominent leaders in the Latin American region, based on the principles of modern science (as stated on the institute's homepage).<sup>56</sup>

**Islamic Educational Institutions in Brazil**

As evidenced by the ILAEI, education has long been an emphasis of Muslim philanthropy and contributions to civil society in Brazil. This is in part due to the fact that the Muslim immigrant community seems to have grown significantly during the third and fourth waves of Arab migration: 1941–1970; 1971–2000.<sup>57</sup> The Brazilian Muslim community appears to have witnessed a significant increase during the 1970s to 1990s, with the number of large mosques doubling by the late 1990s. Additionally, descendants of previous Muslim migrations, including Afro-Brazilians, returned to embracing Islam and became more actively involved. São Paulo is becoming a center for Islamic propagation, not only in Brazil but also in all Latin America.

As the number of Muslim immigrants and the Arab-Islamic community in the country increased, along with mosques and Islamic centers, there arose a need to establish educational institutions for subsequent generations. Islamic schools

---

<sup>56</sup> <https://ilaei.com/site/es/principal/>.

<sup>57</sup> [https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/552/cd\\_2010\\_agrn\\_if.pdf](https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/552/cd_2010_agrn_if.pdf).

were founded to teach both Arabic and Islam to the descendants of Arab Muslims as well as others. The first Islamic school was founded in São Paulo in 1929 (Escola Islâmica Brasileira) in Vila Carrão, which played a significant role in educating Muslim children and teaching Islamic culture and religion.<sup>58</sup> The school has capacity for 1,000 students, and the official Brazilian curriculum is taught along with the Arabic language and Islamic religion.

Another Islamic school is located in Sao Paolo districts A, B, C, and D and is part of the Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Association. There is also the Islamic school of the Islamic Association of San Miguel Paulista and in 2010, the Colegio Islamico Brasileiro<sup>59</sup> was inaugurated in São Paulo, by Association Mesquita Do Bras. There is also the new Ibin Sina School<sup>60</sup> created and founded in 2019 by a group of Muslim entrepreneurs with the aim of providing education for children and young adults based on Arab and Muslim culture.

### **Interviews with Muslim Philanthropists**

To add further texture to the brief overview of Brazilian Muslim philanthropy above, the following includes interviews conducted with a responsible representative of CDIAL and with the director of Islamic Affairs at Al-Madina School in São Bernardo, São Paulo (conducted in spring 2023). This interview was conducted with a member of CDIAL who prefers to remain anonymous.

#### ***CDIAL Interview***

**Q:** In general, how is Muslim philanthropy and charitable work done in Brazil?

**R:** Philanthropy in Brazil is based on institutions, associations, and individuals, where the foundation sponsors some preachers in various cities for philanthropy and teaching the Qur'an and the Arabic language, as well as the work of philanthropy conferences for all segments of the Latin American continent; and it is concerned with helping the poor and needy people with food baskets as well as financial guarantees for needy and financial guarantees for needy families. [We also include in our] charitable work in the state of Brazil, coexistence. Islamic associations in every city also contract with preachers for philanthropy and education. They also do the necessary charitable work for the people of the community, as well as on the Brazilian side.

**Q:** “Islamophobia” has been a persistent issue in Brazil,<sup>61</sup> a country generally known for the coexistence of different religions. What role does your organization play in combating religiously motivated xenophobia?

---

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.islamica.com.br/index.php/quem-somos/historia>.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.colegiobrasileiroislamico.com.br/>.

<sup>60</sup> <https://ibinsina.com.br/?fbclid=IwAR00qB7HZIducvoub1rmpSp2mhqPAj5k3qeINMWu7g9NvZ1ou-q5laTq5OTk>  
<https://www.facebook.com/ibinsi/about>.

<sup>61</sup> See <https://www.ambigrama.com.br/product-page/i-report-on-islamophobia-in-brazil>.

**R:** The foundation always spreads the spirit of tolerance and social and peaceful coexistence through continuous meetings with Brazilians and with non-Muslims. Furthermore, the foundation held an international conference attended by more than 30 countries on this subject. The foundation has a close relationship with leaders of other faiths. The foundation, through books, pamphlets, and meetings, publishes the spirit of tolerance and the statement of moderation of Islam. **Q:** Is your charitable work limited to the Muslim minority or does it extend to all segments of society?

**R:** It also transcends to non-Muslims because we are part of this country and there must be a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, and this in itself is an invitation to explain the truth of Islam.

**Q:** Do you expect changes in the field of Muslim minorities with regard to philanthropy under the government of President Lula da Silva, who is known for his positions with minorities and marginalized societal groups?

**R:** Our relationship with the President is excellent and strong and has roots—a history of cooperation in this regard.

**Q:** What is the relationship between *dawah* and philanthropy in Brazil? How are these terms used and applied among Muslims in Latin America in general?

**R:** There is a close connection between *dawah* and philanthropy. *Dawah* is one of the ways to achieve philanthropy and philanthropic works; from the result of the *dawah* by explaining the importance of solidarity between Muslims, the duty of every Muslim toward his poor brothers, the Muslim's need for good and good work, and the unity of the nation, as there is a correlation between the two concepts.

**Q:** How are the concepts of *zakat*, *fitra*, *sadaqa*, and *waqf* interpreted and applied in Latin America?

**R:** *Zakat* and *sadaqa* are among the largest sources of philanthropy. Therefore, people must be taught the jurisprudence of their religion, which is obligatory, what is supererogatory, and how to spend this money and where. As for the *waqf*, there have been many attempts, and we have organized a large international conference on this subject, and there will be results, God willing, after explaining its importance, the reason for establishing the *waqf*, what is offered, how to supervise it, and so on.

It must be noted that in Brazil, Muslims pay their *zakat* by the intervention of Islamic institutions, those institutions get in touch with businessmen to collect *zakat* from them, each region has its main *sonduq* of *zakat* or *zakat* fund, and all the money collected goes to the fund and then it is distributed mainly in Brazil for other needy Muslims. There is also WAMY<sup>62</sup> (Assembleia Mundial da Juventude Islamica no Brasil), one of the institutions that collects *zakat*. Its director is Ali Abdouni, a Brazilian Lebanese activist. Furthermore, *waqf* is a large term and it has actually a lot of interest in Latin America. Moreover, the Muslim community represented by CDIAL is trying to extend the work of endowments for specific philanthropic purposes, not only in Brazil but across Latin America.

<sup>62</sup> <https://wamybr.org/pt/c/prints>.

In this context, a congress was held online January 24–25, 2022, in collaboration with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and 100 participants from 30 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Canada, Sweden, as well as Latin American and Caribbean countries. The congress dealt with *waqf* and its role in helping Muslim communities, the papers addressed areas of *waqf*, its objectives and importance for minorities, historical and contemporary models of *waqf* and its perspective in law, monitoring and ways of activating it among minorities.

The congress generated many recommendations in this regard:

- The concept of *waqf* and its role in building a civilizational history for Muslims.
- Expanding the culture of *waqf* by modern means of communication.
- *Waqf* is an ongoing charity (*sadaqah jariah*), not interrupted by death.
- The need of *waqf* in building mosques, hospitals, and universities.
- Teaching legal rules of *waqf* in Islamic universities and institutes.
- Holding workshops and sessions for those in charge of *waqf*.
  - Partnerships between Ministries of *awqaf* and *zakat* funds to enhance this practice.

### *Al-Madina School Interview*

The second interview was with Mohamad Ahmed Amamathe, director of religious affairs at Al-Madina School in São Bernardo, São Paulo. The following is a brief interview about his organization and the broader field of educational philanthropy among Muslims in Brazil:

**Q:** First, tell us about yourself and your organization.

**R:** My name is. Mohamad Ahmad Amame I am originally Lebanese, but I hold Brazilian citizenship. I graduated from the College of Islamic Dawah in Damascus, Syria, and also from the College of Education in Brazil. The Islamic Madina School is supervised by a group of intellectual young members of the community. It has been active in its new form for nearly ten years, and accepts students from the age of two up to the end of middle school. The school has a total of 200 students distributed across three stages: kindergarten, elementary, and middle school. In addition to the official Brazilian curriculum, the school offers Quranic studies, Arabic language, and religious education. These subjects are officially registered with the Education Directorate in the city of São Bernardo. This city is considered a suburb of São Paulo and has a significant population of the Islamic community, mostly of Lebanese origin. The majority of the students in the school are Muslim, the non-Muslims are very few, but they are committed to the school's curriculum.

**Q:** How did the idea of establishing the Islamic Madina School in Brazil come about?

**R:** In the 1990s, after a new wave of migration by intellectual young individuals, they felt a pressing need to establish Islamic schools to accommodate their children. They found that the Brazilian schools were not suitable for the type of education they

wanted for their children. There was already a school considered the first Islamic school in São Paulo, but over time, it became more Brazilian than Islamic. In 1996, an independent kindergarten project began, and there was an extraordinary demand for it, to the point where the space became insufficient for the students within two years. The responsible association proposed transferring this kindergarten to their school and taking responsibility for it. This transfer indeed took place in 1998, and the school started operating in a new form. The building was renovated, a mosque specifically for the students was constructed, and the high school phase was inaugurated. Things were going well, except for the challenge of distant locations, including the São Bernardo area.

The idea of establishing a school in São Bernardo arose, but the resources were not readily available. An alternative idea emerged to introduce an Arabic department in a Brazilian school, and this was implemented for a short period. However, the idea was later transferred to another school, but nothing changed. Eventually, the idea of purchasing the existing Brazilian school, known as the Madina School, emerged. The community purchased the school, and over time, it transformed into a religious and Arabic-oriented institution, in accordance with the needs of the community. It has been operating in this capacity for the past ten years.

**Q:** How is charitable and philanthropic work generally in Brazil?

**R:** In Brazil, the work of *dawah* and charity varies between activity and stagnation, especially since the community is not highly interested in cultural and intellectual matters. There is a strong emphasis on trade and commerce. However, this does not prevent the spread of Islam among the Brazilian people and the establishment of mosques in Islamic gatherings.

**Q:** What are the main achievements of your organization in the field of educating Muslim children about their language and religion to preserve their identity?

**R:** Indeed, praise be to Allah. The school has become a secure haven for the children of the community, and numerous students who have completed their education in the various stages of the school are continuing their higher studies in Brazilian universities. Furthermore, the presence of students in Brazilian mosques has become apparent and noteworthy.

**Q:** What are the cultural activities of your organization?

**R:** Cultural activities throughout the year hold significance, and the school also participates in external events. Most recently, the students took part in the exhibition of the Holy Quran held at the Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Mosque, the first of its kind in Latin America. Moreover, the students currently have a scheduled visit to the library of São Bernardo city. Additionally, by the will of Allah, the school will host an exhibition next Saturday on literature and poetry in the Portuguese language, presented through an Islamic religious perspective.

**Q:** Islamophobia has recently spread in the Western world and has also reached Brazil, a country known for its coexistence and religious diversity. What role does your organization play in combating this phenomenon?

**R:** Certainly, by promoting authentic Islam through our school, we have taken a significant step in combating extremism. Even though our region, Alhamdulillah, has not been affected by this phenomenon, and things are going well.

**Q:** Do you engage in any other charitable work?

**R:** Weekly religious gatherings continue to take place in houses, and we also participate in distributing food packages to those in need during Ramadan and holidays.

**Q:** Is your charitable work limited to the Muslim minority or does it extend to all sectors of society?

**R:** Of course, we try, in principle, to preserve our capital through the work of community members. The majority of charitable work is directed toward community members, but this does not mean that Brazilian society is excluded from it; rather, its involvement is limited.

**Q:** Do you expect any changes in the file of Muslim minorities regarding charitable work under the government of President “Lula,” known for his positions on minorities and marginalized social groups?

**R:** President Lula, throughout his previous terms, has stood by the community and minorities, and these stances are important. However, we need to make greater use of them so that the laws in Brazil can support such matters.

**Q:** Does *da’wa* fall within the scope of philanthropy? Is philanthropy considered a form of *da’wa*? How are these terms used and applied among Muslims in Latin America in general?

**R:** The essence is that charitable work should serve as a means of promoting the Islamic call, as aiding in building the body is important, but even more important is building the soul and instilling the values of our true religion. In Brazil specifically, there is great respect for the cultures of different peoples, including Islam. As a school, we have our own rules that are based on Islamic values, and they are recognized and adopted as special laws within our institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The interviews with the CDIAL representative and Mohamad Ahmad Amame from Al-Madina School in São Bernardo provide valuable insights into the landscape of Muslim philanthropy and charitable work in Brazil. Both interviewees underscored inclusivity, with philanthropy extending to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Their emphasis on positive government relations, particularly with President Lula, suggest potential support for philanthropic initiatives. Education was also highlighted as a tool for preserving Islamic identity and combating misconceptions. The integration of *dawah* and philanthropy is also touched upon, with both organizations promoting Islamic values through their charitable activities.

In summary, these interviews collectively portray philanthropy in Brazil as emphasizing inclusivity, education, government relations, and the interconnectedness of *dawah* and philanthropy in promoting Islamic values. They also illustrate the multifaceted landscape of Muslim philanthropy in Brazil, examining its historical

development, institutional foundations, and key players. Through interviews with representatives from Centro de Divulgação do Islam para América Latina (CDIAL) and Al-Madina School in São Bernardo, São Paulo, the above sheds light on the intricate interplay between *dawah*, *zakat*, and the broader philanthropic initiatives within the Brazilian Muslim community.

The philanthropic infrastructure in Brazil reflects a rich tapestry of contributions, with educational, cultural, and social dimensions. From the initial philanthropic initiatives in the late 20th century to the contemporary proliferation of charitable societies and cultural centers, the Brazilian Muslim community has actively engaged in shaping its philanthropic identity. External support from Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, has played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of mosques, Islamic centers, and educational institutions.

The establishment and evolution of key organizations such as CDIAL, FAMBRAS, CCBI, LJIBB, UNI, and others signify a coordinated effort to consolidate and strengthen the presence of Islam in Brazil. Furthermore, the integration of halal certification by FAMBRAS has not only contributed to religious practices but has also helped position Brazil as a global leader in halal meat exports.

The rise in the number of Islamic institutions, as evidenced by the data presented, reflects the resilience and expansion of the Muslim community in Brazil. The geographical distribution of these institutions across various regions underscores the widespread impact of Islamic philanthropy in the country. Moreover, education has emerged as a cornerstone of Muslim philanthropy in Brazil, with the establishment of schools dedicated to teaching Arabic language and Islamic studies. The commitment to education is seen as vital for the transmission of cultural and religious values to successive generations, fostering a sense of identity among Brazilian Muslims. The ongoing initiatives highlighted in this contribution underscore the commitment of the Brazilian Muslim community to contribute meaningfully to Brazilian society. As the landscape continues to evolve, the interplay between *dawah*, *zakat*, and philanthropy is poised to play a crucial role in the continued development of the Muslim community in Brazil.

Appendix 1

Brazil

01 Dhu-Al-Hijjah 1405  
17 August 2985

Ms Lelia Gonzalez  
Ladeira de Sta. Teresa. 106 S/101  
20.241 - Sta. Teresa  
Rio de Janeiro - RJ  
BRAZIL

Dear Ms Gonzalez,

It was a great pleasure meeting you in Rome during the conference of the Organisation of International Development. I am enclosing herein, as I promised you, parts of the chapter of my book on "Muslim Minorities in the World Today" on Islam in Brazil as well as some papers on the subject for your information.

With kind regards.

Sincerely,

DR. ALI KETTANI  
Director General


Encl:



## Appendix 2

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Islamic Foundation for Science  
Technology and Development**  
Insurance Building - Airport Street  
P. O. Box 9833 - Jeddah  
Tel. 6322291 - 6322273  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



مِنْصَةُ الْمَوْجِبَاتِ الْإِسْلَامِيَّةِ

IFSTAD

**المؤسسة الإسلامية  
للعلوم والتكنولوجيا والتنمية**  
عمارة التأمينات الاجتماعية - شارع المطار  
جدة : ٩٨٣٣ - جـ  
٦٣٢٢٢٩١ / ٦٣٢٢٢٧٣  
الملحة الغربية السعودية

18 Safar 1408  
11 October 1987

Prof. Dr. R.A. Malik  
Depto. de Engenharia Mecanica  
Universidade de Brasilia  
70.910 - Brasilia - DF  
BRAZIL

Dear Prof. Malik,

I was indeed very much pleased to receive your letter of September 6 for which I thank you as well as for the enclosures.

I was very impressed by you during our meeting in Brasilia and I wish you success in your efforts for the Muslim community. I am honored to have such a distinguished "disciple" as your goodself concerning Muslim minorities and I wish you success in your project NEMI.

With my most brotherly regards,

Sincerely,

PROF. DR. ALI KETTANI  
Director General

*علي كيتاني*

## References

- Ação Social Islâmica na Periferia de São Bernardo do Campo* | Portal IslamBR. (2020, April 19). Portal IslamBR. <https://cdial.org.br/acao-social-islamica-na-periferia-de-sao-bernardo-do-campo/>
- Ajansi, N. D. R. (n.d.). *Brazil is the biggest Halal food supplier in all over the world*. <https://magazinebbm.com/blog/brazil-is-the-biggest-halal-food-supplierin-all-over-the-world-2266>
- Ambigrama (n.d.). *I report on Islamophobia in Brazil*. <https://www.ambigrama.com.br/product-page/i-report-on-islamophobia-in-brazil>
- Benlebbah, F., & Montenegro, S. (2013). *Los musulmanes en Brasil: Comunidades, instituciones, identidades*. Publicaciones del IEHL.
- Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico de Foz do Iguaçu. (2022, July 20). *Solidariedade Libanesa*. <https://www.mesquitafoz.com.br/solidariedade-libanesa>
- História*. (n.d.). Escola Islâmica Brasileira. <https://www.islamica.com.br/index.php/quem-somos/historia>
- IBGE. (2000). *Censo Demográfico*. <https://www.ibge.gov.br/geociencias/cartas-e-mapas/mapas-municipais/27440-mapas-municipais-para-fins-estatisticos.html?edicao=27441&t=acesso-ao-produto>
- IBGE. (2010). *Censo demográfico 2010*. [https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/552/cd\\_2010\\_agrn\\_if.pdf](https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/552/cd_2010_agrn_if.pdf)
- Learning to Give. (n.d.). *Philanthropy*. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/philanthropy>
- Philanthropy New York. (2008). *History of philanthropy*. <https://philanthropynewyork.org/sites/default/files/resources/History%20of%20Philanthropy.pdf>
- WAMY Brazil. (n.d.). *Publicações*. <https://wamybr.org/pt/c/prints>
- Zakat Foundation. (n.d.). *What is nisab in Islam*. <https://www.zakat.org/what-is-ni-ab-in-islam>