

Headline	Avoid the Clash of Civilisations	Location	Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic
Publication	Vecherniy Bishkek	Department	UCA
Page No		Date	8 August 2014
Reporter	Amalia Benliyan	Periodical	Newspaper
Photographer	Sergei Medvedyev, Mikhail Romanyuk	Language	English
URL:			

Canadian media expert, Professor at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication, Dr. Karim H. Karim came to Kyrgyzstan at the invitation of the University of Central Asia (UCA) to develop the curriculum of its Department of Media.



Volunteer

Construction of the UCA, as is known, has started in Naryn last year. The inauguration of the university is scheduled for 2016. According to UCA Director General, Dr Bohdan Krawchenko, the main focus will be on the quality of academic programmes. UCA has invited experts in various areas to analyse the situation in the education sector and the labour market.

The Department of Media, in particular, will admit students from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. It is therefore necessary to think of a curriculum based on the context of the country, its standards, and one that is in accordance with international curricula, so that future media personnel have employment opportunities, both at home and abroad.

It is noteworthy that Dr Karim H. Karim has come to Kyrgyzstan as a volunteer. The Aga Khan Development Network offers a *Time and Knowledge* programme. In summary, the programme invites specialists with extensive experience to apply, and their details are available in a database. Whenever expert assistance is required in any part of the world where Aga Khan projects are implemented, volunteers are invited there and apply offer their time and knowledge. In this case, knowledge services of volunteers are not paid. The Network only provides them with accommodation, board, and travel expenses.

So you've dropped everything to go to the other end of the world and work for free?

Yes, and I do not consider this a heroic deed. For me, it is a great opportunity to share my professional experiences and be part of something big – says Dr. Karim H. Karim. – The opening of such a large university that unites three countries is a very important project. I am glad to be asked for advice. It may look as though consultants spend their own time and do not receive any compensation for their services. In fact, they gain invaluable experience and a unique chance to know another country. By the way, there are 30 volunteers working under this UCA programme, some of them are young professionals, which is very gratifying. I am glad to see that the new generation does not put money in the forefront.

Following the trail of Huntington

What did you know about Kyrgyzstan and the region as a whole before coming here?

I'm interested in Islam and migration. I study the ways Muslims live in different countries. In this regard, the example of Central Asia is also interesting to me.

How do you think Western media has changed since the events of September 11, 2001?

I have devoted some of my articles and books to the subject. Having analysed the press and television coverage during this period, I can say that after 9/11, media were under the influence of Samuel Huntington, an American sociologist and political scientist, the author of the concept of ethno-cultural division of civilisations. In 1996, he published his book *The Clash of Civilisations* that sparked a massive public outcry. In his book, the author states that conflicts between groups of different civilisations will be the central and most dangerous aspect of global policy.

After 9/11, Huntington's theory was back in the spotlight, being interpreted by everybody in their own way. Journalists started to describe the East and the West as two different civilisations mired in constant conflict. Contraposition of the Muslims and the rest of the world became sharper.

Do you also believe there is a war between these two worlds?

In my opinion, the processes we are witnessing now in the world should not be called a war of civilisations, but the war of incomprehension. All ethnic conflicts arise from ignorance and lack of understanding of other cultures. My recent two books are about this.

Does the younger generation of journalists that you teach also have stereotypical thinking?

My students have a great desire to fully grasp the world, communicate with different people, and this brings me hope.

Do you think they have enough intellectual and spiritual strength to rise above the ideological struggle, as they call it?

Like all young people, they are a product of the society they live in. Much depends on the education their parents have given them. Education and critical thinking development have no small share in this. Back in the 70s, the Canadian government set a course for multicultural policy, introduced relevant laws and improved them over the years. As you know, there are a lot of immigrants in Canada, so a policy of pluralism is a must. We have many ethnic newspapers; publications about culture and traditions of different ethnic groups appear periodically in the media.

The theme of inter-ethnic concord is also reflected in the cinema. For example, famous Canadian film director, screenwriter, producer and actor of Armenian origin, Atom Egoyan, shoots his films through the lens of history and culture of Armenia. Another Canadian director,

Indian Canadian from Kenya

How long have you been living in Canada?

I was born in Kenya, although I am an ethnic Indian. I lived in different countries, and I have been a Canadian for more than 30 years now.

Has this country become home for you?

It has, and there are at least two reasons for this. First, Canadian society has accepted me with open arms. Secondly, it is the birthplace of my children.

Have you ever talked to people who were unable to feel at home in this society?

To be honest, no such examples come to mind immediately. Even those immigrants who live in their own cultural communities in Canada say it feels like home. Just like in many other countries, we have also began encountering young people exposed to the ideas of religious fundamentalism, even among Canadian-born residents, who are non-Muslims. These are the people who cannot find their place not only in the society, but also in their own families. Indeed, many of them come from the relatively prosperous middle class.

What do they lack in prosperous Canada?

This is exactly what we are trying to figure out. At present I am involved in a project where a group of sociologists, theologians, political scientists, journalists and NGO representatives are conducting a study of Muslims to gain better insight into the youth and what drives them. Our goal is to establish a connection between various public institutions and work together to find a way to solve this problem. It is important to note that the project is financed from the national budget.

I wouldn't say that this is a problem of enormous proportions for the country. But even a few cases can be alarming. Even if only two residents from a Canadian city go to fight in Syria, it is a serious matter. Everyone is very afraid of the escalation of extremism.

By the way

The building of the University of Central Asia was designed by famous Japanese architect Arata Isozaki. In 2016, Naryn will have a large campus with a developed infrastructure that will provide everything that is necessary for students and teachers, as well as the framework for modern research. The project is financed by the Aga Khan Development Network and international partners.