**Celebrating Ramadan from Chile to China**

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The celebration of the month of Ramadan possesses an important religious and social meaning for the Islamic community and Latin America is no exception. In the Hispanic world, Muslims should adapt their schedules in order to break their fast, but at times, due to work difficulties, they have no choice but to delay it. They are limited to breaking the fast with a glass of water, and have to wait until they leave work to break the fast collectively as tradition states.

**Ramadan in Chile**
Fareed Maymoun, a Moroccan immigrant, is used to waking up early to go to his job as a construction worker, but when Ramadan starts he gets up half an hour before sunrise. “It’s an important time for me. For the 3 years that I have been living in Chile Ramadan has a very special meaning for me. The first day is marked by a reunion at the mosque to celebrate another year, and break the fast together with the rest of the community.”

Like Fareed, the 3,000 Muslims that live in Chile try to integrate their lives with their spiritual beliefs in a difficult environment. “Christian co-workers are now used to my fasting. When we are on our lunch break many openly admire the will of those who are fasting, although they do not understand why we do it,” he states.

The Islamic Center itself fills with children and their parents, when the prayers are finished families get together to enjoy the many activities prepared: popular songs, and delicious food.

“In the mosque a festive atmosphere is evident, people fill the halls and their children run from here to there. You hear kul 'am wa anta bikhair, to wish many happy returns for the beginning of Ramadan” Nawal Alvarez states. The majority of families take advantage of this day to eat together. “We prepare Mote con huesillo, a special juice with pieces of dried apricot.” explains Nawal.

“In Morocco Fareed and I would have met with all our relatives, but here we’re going to eat with some friends at the mosque. Last year was the first time to break the fast without my family and it was very hard”, adds Yasmina, Fareed’s wife.

Nawal and Yasmina have it all prepared for this year, the first weekend of Ramadan they will organize an iftar (meal to break the fast) at the mosque. “We will be eight women cooking and the menu is a traditional one, first sweet tea then couscous and dried fruits with many Ramadan sweets”, explains Yasmina.

The first days of Ramadan as well as the last days are marked by family visits while children enjoy their new toys and sweets. However, for those working, their situation is no different from those of any Muslim minority.

“The difficult thing is when we are not allowed to leave a short time before the Maghrib (sunset) Prayers. For us, it is very important to be with the family at the Prayers and the breakfast. Normally we offer to work during lunch breaks to compensate. But sometimes the supervisors do not accept,” stated Fareed. “In Chile it is more difficult than in other countries because here there are fewer Muslim immigrants. In France, or Germany, there are businesses where Muslims are a majority and they are able to manage their work hours.” He said.

**Ramadan in Spain**
In Spain an Agreement of Cooperation, between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain was established in 1992 and approved as Law 26/1992. The law affirms in article 12.1 that: “Members of the Islamic Communities belonging to the Islamic Commission of Spain who desire, will be able to request the interruption of their work on Friday of each week, from 1 p.m. to 4.20 p.m., as well as finishing work one hour before sunset, during the month of Ramadan”.

The celebration of Ramadan acquires a special importance in all Spanish cities--like Madrid, Barcelona and Catalonia--where numerous Muslim communities reside. Muslims get together to break their fast and they organize social meetings in the mosques. Amin Villoch, a Spanish Muslim, illustrates this, “The first day of Ramadan more than 9.000 Muslims gather at the mosques in Madrid to celebrate the breaking of the fast. Ramadan is an important factor in reuniting the community. The Islamic Center of Madrid always prepares many activities during this month for them.”

After the Maghrib Prayers, the mosque becomes a place of festivity. Everyone eats harrisa (an oriental sweet) and dates; Ramadan treats which no Muslim house lacks. “Women spend all day preparing typical food to offer to their relatives and friends whom they meet at the mosque”, explains Amira Masaad. “The first day of Ramadan is a special day. Although, it’s difficult being far away from my family, the mosque organizes events and activities to bring the Muslim community in Spain together.”

Many of the Muslims living in Catalonia visit the mosques occasionally, more to meet the community than to pray. However, when Ramadan starts, the mosques are filled with Muslims. “Muslims celebrate fully these 30 days and dedicate a lot of time for prayers.” This is when the situation becomes difficult too, “the lack of space for Prayer comes to light during Ramadan. The Catalonian Muslim community puts a lot of effort into establishing new places for Prayers and to be able to continue to attract more Muslims.” Other activities that Spanish mosques organize during Ramadan include Arabic classes, Islamic culture classes and Qur’an and Hadith discussions.

**Ramadan in Nicaragua & Dominican Republic**
In Nicaragua approximately 300 Palestinian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Libyan and Nigerian citizens, as well as 4 Nicaraguans; all faithful Muslims, celebrate the month of the Ramadan. In 1999, Muslims established a mosque in Cuidad Jardin, where they gather every Friday to pray Ahmed Hajjami, a Muslim who has resided in Nicaragua for 6 years, assured us that approximately 300 faithful Muslims, celebrate Ramadan in Nicaragua. “We begin at half past five in the morning. There isn’t any difference in complying with Ramadan in Nicaragua or any other part of the world”, he said.

Nevertheless, he emphasized that given the characteristics of Nicaragua, it is more difficult to carry out Ramadan’s obligations. “One of the main obstacles is the time to pray, on some occasions we only pray in the morning and at night, it is almost impossible to pray the other three times,” he explained.

For Muslims in Nicaragua, the renewal of faith during this period is the main celebration. Ramadan is not a month of penitence by fasting, but of festivals with banquets, gifts and new clothes.

The mosque also publishes a calendar with prayer times and times of fasting, which is coordinated with Al-Noor Mosque in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. In the Dominican Republic there are approximately 2,500 Muslims, and the ones that reside in the capital regularly attend the festivities of Ramadan at Al-Noor Mosque, the only mosque in the city.

Yunis Ribas explains, “Although the community is rather small in the Dominican Republic, Muslims gather on the first day at Al-Noor Mosque and their families usually accompany them. Later they meet in Recoleta at a halal (permitted by Allah) restaurant, a Jordanian immigrant runs it. We usually have harira, a traditional Moroccan soup, and shawarma, a spicy meat dish, on the first day.”

The mosque distributes audio materials for the Muslim community, and Muslims gather for Tarawih Prayers before heading home. “You can see the happiness of Muslims when they exchange greetings after the prayers, especially when there are new faces. Usually the day ends with a traditional herbal tea.” Yunis declared.