

# Islam in Costa Rica, Mexico, Central and South America:

## Profile of a New Religious Movement

By Sally May

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**Official Name:** Islam

**Founder Internationally:** Historically, the religion of Islam was founded by the Prophet Muhammad, with his wife Khadijah and early followers, in Mecca in 610 CE. Muhammad, then a simple merchant, was allegedly visited by the Angel Gabriel on Mount Hira, at which time he was called to be a Prophet by God. The Prophet Muhammad received direct revelation from God throughout the remaining years of his life ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 677).

**Date and Place of Birth:** It is thought that the Prophet Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca (current day Saudi Arabia) in 570 CE.

**Date and Place of Death:** The Prophet Muhammad died in the city of Medina, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 632 CE.

**Year and Place of Founding Internationally:** The Prophet Muhammad's first revelation was received in 610CE and he soon started preaching to his Meccan neighbors. The Arabic peninsula was mainly polytheistic in this period, and the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca was devoted to polytheistic idols. The monotheistic nature of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings meant that his new religious teachings were not welcomed by the majority of the town. Although he gained some converts mainly from the poorer clans in Mecca, which were attracted to Muhammad's messages of social reform ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 677).

Due to the resistance to Islam in Mecca, in 622 CE Muhammad and his followers fled north of Mecca to the Jewish settlement of Yathrib, which was renamed Medina, and the first Islamic community was founded here. From its birth Islam was a religion of expansion, and the Muslim community undertook several military campaigns in the coming years, against Meccan forces. By 630CE Muhammad had taken control of Mecca, and continued to carry out military campaigns in Northern Arabia. By the time of Muhammad's death in 632 CE, Islam had spread to the entire Arabian peninsula ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 678).

**Founder of the Costa Rican Islamic community:** Dr. Abdulfatah Sa'sa started the Islamic community in Costa Rica, when he moved to the country with his Costa Rican wife (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

**Year and Place of Founding Nationally:** Dr. Sa'sa arrived in San Jose in 1973. The early Islamic community consisted of only fifteen people who were mainly immigrants, and Friday prayers were held in a different person's home each week. Dr. Sa'sa founded the Islamic Cultural Association of Costa Rica

in late 1994. He is currently the secretary of the Costa Rica Centro Islámico de Costa Rica. Dr. Sa'sa has also been the Professor of Arabic at the University of Costa Rica, since 1982 (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

**Sacred Texts:** The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam, it is considered to be the direct revelation from God, spoken through the Prophet Muhammad. The majority of Muslims believe that the Angel Gabriel dictated revelations to Muhammad, which he repeated to his wife and early followers. The earliest members of the Islamic community memorized these revelations and wrote them down. They were collected into the Qur'anic form after Muhammad's death in the time of the third caliph Umar. Muhammad was said to be illiterate at the time of revelation and this is often used to counteract arguments that the Qur'an has a human origin ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 680).

Historically, there have been differing opinions in the Islamic ummah about whether the Qur'an is created or eternal. Some believe the Qur'an has always existed in the eternal mind of Allah, whereas others believe that only Allah himself can be eternal and therefore the Qur'an was created at a certain time.

The Qur'an contains 114 suras, but does not represent a logical narrative structure. The Qur'an gives attention to figures from the Hebrew Bible as well as the Christian scriptures. Islam itself is rooted in this monotheistic tradition, with emphasis on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, all as messengers of God ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 680).

The hadiths are also considered by some Muslims to be sacred. The hadiths are the non-Qur'anic traditions about Muhammad that were gathered after his death, often including his deeds and decisions. Some hadiths are considered more reliable than others, but all have a chain of narrators, both who heard the hadith, and who transmitted it at each stage. The more reliable hadiths originate with Muhammad's early companions ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 678).

**Basic Doctrines and Belief:** The five pillars of Islam are the basic doctrine of the religion, which focuses on a submission to God. **1.** The shahadah, or confession of faith. In order to become a Muslim one must state: 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger'. **2.** A Muslim must pray five times a day, this occurs at specific times and facing the direction of Mecca. **3.** Zakat: Muslims are expected to give 2.5 percent of their income to the poor and needy in the community, usually this is done at the local mosque. **4.** Ramadan. Unless prohibited by bad health, all Muslims are required to fast during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan, which is determined by the lunar calendar. **5.** The hajj. This pilgrimage to the Ka'ba in Mecca is required for every able bodied Muslim at one time during their lives. There are various rituals to be completed once within in the Holy City, which include circumambulating the Ka'ba and visiting other important Qur'anic sites ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 683).

The Qur'an paints a clear picture of the Muslim afterlife. Heaven in Islam is a garden paradise, with food, drink and sexual pleasure, in which believers will be in the presence of God. The Qur'an is keen to portray Hell as an evil place of fire and torment, and many suras are devoted to its evil nature. The Day of Judgement in Islam is a certainty and all Muslims will be judged at this time ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 683).

Another key belief, rooted in the Qur'an, is Muhammad's hijra or night journey. It is believed that in 620CE the Angel Gabriel brought Muhammad by night to Jerusalem, where he conversed with Jesus, Moses and Abraham. Muhammad and the Angel then ascended into heaven for a time, after which he returned to Mecca the same night. Muslims believe that the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is built on the spot from which Muhammad ascended ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 677).

The concept of jihad in Islam traditionally means simply a spiritual struggle, but more militant Islamic groups may interpret this as closer to a Holy War waged against infidels ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 684).

Muslims mostly use the life and deeds of Muhammad as an example of the way they should lead their lives.

**Historical Ties to Other Groups Internationally:** There are three main branches of Islam: Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam, and Sufism. Ninety percent of all Muslims are Sunni, but the community split over the succession of the Prophet. Sunni Islam has accepted the succession of caliphs, which were chosen in the early Muslim community, and the various Muslim dynasties that followed. Shi'a Islam accepts the caliphs but then argue that the fourth caliph Ali (Muhammad's cousin) was in fact the first Imam and Shi'ites subsequently follow Ali's descendants. However, there are various groups within Shi'a Islam differing on how many Imam's followed Ali to lead the Shi'a community. Sufism is categorized as Islamic mysticism, with the most famous Sufi being the great Islamic writer Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) ('Islam' in R.O.W. 2002, 685).

**Historical Ties to Other Groups in Costa Rica:** The Sunni Islamic community in Costa Rica sends a representative to the Central American Committee for Religions of Peace. This includes various Christian groups, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Baha'i representatives. The Sunni Islamic community also has a relationship with the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica, and with the Quaker Peace Center in San José (Interview, 13/10/2011).

**Links to Other Groups/Organizations outside Costa Rica:** The Sunni community in Costa Rica is linked closely with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which is based in Rabat, Morocco. The Sheik in San José came to the community via this organization, which pays his salary, while the local Muslim community provides accommodation and living expenses. This organization holds conferences on Islam in Latin America and worldwide (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

**Classification Code Holland/PROLADES:** D4.02

**Principle Educational Centers:** The Mezquita de Omar runs voluntary educational conferences every Saturday from 4-6 pm. These sessions are focused on questions surrounding divorce, remarriage, polygamy and the role of women in Islam. They do not yet have an official Education Center (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

**Principle Communications Media:** There is no official newsletter or e-mail system for adherents to contact each other. Mostly it is done by telephone (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

**Size (Adherents and Members) Internationally:** In 2009 a demographic study found that there are 1.57 billion Muslims, which is roughly 23% of the world population at this time. Islam is the second largest religion in the world (Pew Research).

**Size (Adherents and Members) Nationally:** Islam in Costa Rica is estimated to be 0.01% of the national population, with about 500 Muslim families. The Muslim community is comprised of immigrants from Algeria, India, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, Somalia, Pakistan, the Palestinian Territories and Syria (*Tico Times*, 2008). In Costa Rica many Palestinian immigrants arrived after the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967. Most of the recent immigrants to Costa Rica have been urban, professional and Muslim (Marin-Guzman, 2000, 63).

Dr Sa'sa estimates there to be in total 1,000-1,500 Muslims living in Costa Rica. The majority is located in San José, and he knows of one Islamic family in Puntarenas. Dr. Sa'sa states that, at this time in his Sunni community, there are approximately 35-40 people who attend the mosque each Friday, and on feast days this number is closer to 150 persons. He suggests that it is the first generation immigrant adherents who come regularly on a Friday, and the younger second generation Costa Rican Muslims who attend mainly on feast days. In the community at the Mezquita de Omar, there have been approximately ten local converts, and these are mostly single female Ticas (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

#### **Number of Regular Meeting Places Nationally:**

**Sunni Community:** The mosque was built in 2003, and is the only one in Costa Rica (*Tico Times*, 2008). Dr. Sa'sa noted that it took six years to raise enough money to build the mosque (1994-2000); the community sent delegations to the Muslim communities in Panama to ask for contributions, and this raised about \$30,000 (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011).

Centro Cultural Musulmán de Costa Rica,  
Mezquita de Omar, Colonia Montelimar,  
Cantón de Guadalupe, Provincia de San José;  
Apartado 608-2050, San Pedro, Costa Rica.

The principal spiritual leader is an Egyptian Imam, Sheik Omar Abdel Aziz, who has been at the mosque for nine years.



**Shi'ite Community:** These Muslims have a Cultural Center in downtown San José, and it has been reported that some meet in a private home in Sabanilla. Dr. Sa'sa notes that it is not as important for

Shi'ite Muslims to pray on a Friday in a mosque, and often this is done at home. He notes that before there was a Shi'ite cultural center in San José, some Shi'ite Muslims came to the Mezquita de Omar (Sally May interview, 13/10/2011). Note: there is no existing conflict between the Sunni and Shi'a communities in Costa Rica (WebIslam 2006).

**News and Controversies:** When interviewed for 'WebIslam' Dr. Sa'sa noted that many Costa Ricans believe that Islam is violent and a source of war, but insists that Islam is a religion of peace. He argues that the majority of the propaganda about Islam found in the newspapers is negative, and thus people have a wrong impression of Muslims (WebIslam 2006).

In the same article it is noted that some aspects of Islam are incompatible with Western culture, but Costa Rican Muslims observe the laws of the country they live in. For example, Islam does not accept that a woman can be a judge or the leader of a nation. Furthermore, polygamy, which is permitted in Islam but is illegal in Costa Rica, is not practiced (WebIslam 2006).

### **Islam in Mexico, Central and South America:**

Muslim scholars believe that the first wave of Muslim immigration arrived in the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Spanish and Portuguese colonists. The Muslims were required to claim Catholicism as their religion but many stayed faithful to Islam secretly. Researchers believe that this initial wave was eradicated during the Catholic Inquisition (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 31). The second wave of Muslim immigration was from Africa, brought to the New World as slaves. Historic examples show that in 1758 Muslims led an armed revolt in Haiti, and African Muslims formed a short-lived Muslim state in Brazil in 1830 (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 31). Around 1830 a third wave of Muslims arrived from Asia, usually as indentured servants but by the end of the century Syrian and Lebanese were arriving as legal immigrants most of whom settled in Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Santiago de Chile (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 32).

The Costa Rican Muslim community is much smaller than larger groups in other countries, such as Argentina and Brazil (*Tico Times*, 2008).

It is important to note that not all Arab immigration is Muslim and not all Muslim immigration is Arab. Muslims arriving from Palestine and Lebanon are often Eastern Orthodox Christians. Muslims also arrive in Central and South America from Eastern European countries and Indonesia.

### **Mexico and Central America**

**Mexico:** The Muslim population is approximately 110,000 (Pew Research, 2009). The Muslim community in Mexico is as old as its colonization by Spain. There is a division between types of Islam in Mexico, the conservative tendency of the Islamic religion and the 'Mexican way' of Islam. Originally Muslims met at the Pakistan Embassy, but in the middle of the 1980s the Islamic Cultural Centre of Mexico was initiated. In 1993 the first office of Islam in Mexico was opened, which offered courses on Arabic and Islam (Zeraoui, 1).

Omar Weston is considered to be the leader of the local Muslim community in Mexico; he is dedicated to a diffusion of the Islamic message, and opened up the mosque even to non-Muslims, to promote an idea of local Islam. This was not well received by the Saudi Arabian authorities, which had partly helped fund the mosque (Zaraoui, 2). Many conversions to Islam are attributed to Sufism. Rarely for a Muslim community, the Sheik Amina Teslima al Yerrahi is the female leader of the Sufi Order in Mexico; she is also an inter-religious leader and a pacifist (Zeraoui, 2).

In 1989 the Guadalajara mosque was inaugurated; this is the base for the mainly Lebanese Shi'ite community (Zeraoui, 2).

There is a small Shi'ite Muslim population in the city of Torreón, Coahuila, and an estimated 500 Muslims in the San Cristóbal de las Casas area in Chiapas (International Religious Freedom Report, 2010).

**Belize:** The Muslim population is approximately 1,400 (Pew Research 2009). The Muslim community in Belize is led by the Islamic Mission of Belize, headquartered in Belize City. Formally recognized in 1978, the Islamic center has a prayer hall and primary school, which teaches both Islamic and academic courses (Belize Visitor, 2007).

**Guatemala:** the Muslim population is approximately 1,000 (Pew Research 2009). The 2010 International Religious Freedom Report noted that a small community of Muslims resides primarily in Guatemala City.

**Honduras:** the Muslim population is approximately 11,000 (Pew Research 2009). The 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Honduras notes that there is a mosque in San Pedro Sula.

**El Salvador:** the Muslim Population is approximately 2,000 (Pew Research 2009). The Muslim population is involved in inter-faith dialogue in El Salvador; the "Mezquita de Luz" is part of the Religions for Peace ("Religiones por la Paz") group with other Christian denominations and the Jewish group in El Salvador (Escobar, 2006).

**Nicaragua:** The Muslim population is approximately 1,000 (Pew Research 2009). Palestinian immigration to Nicaragua occurred from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1917; most of these immigrants were Eastern Orthodox Christians, but some were Muslim. Members of these Muslim families married Nicaraguan women and, despite being Muslim, their children were raised as Catholics (Marin-Guzamn, 2000, 49-53). The Palestinian descendants of these immigrants are involved in the recent Palestinian political situation, as is the nation. The Sandinistas opened a PLO embassy in Managua in 1981, which was the first diplomatic seat of Palestinian representation in Central America and is the only one. Other Central America countries, including Costa Rica and El Salvador, moved embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, acknowledging this as the capital of Israel in the early 1980s (Marin-Guzman, 2000, 57-8).

The Islamic Cultural Center in Managua serves as the primary prayer space for Muslims in the city, with approximately 350 men attending on a regular basis. Granada, Masaya and León have smaller prayer centers in homes of local prominent Muslims (International Religious Freedom Report, 2007).

**Panama:** The Muslim community is approximately 24,000 (Pew Research 2009). Some sources suggest that the first group of Muslims came from Africa in 1552 as slaves to work in gold mines, but rebelled against their masters and colonizers. This initial group formed Islamic councils and mosques but were eventually killed or died out. The second wave of Muslim immigration began from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1913 a group that arrived in Panama from the Indo-Pakistan region became merchants and formed an organization called Sunni Indo-Pakistan Muslim Society. From 1929-1948 there was an organization named the Panama Muslim Mission, which began to build a place of prayer. Spaces for classes and other community activities emerged over the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As of December 1996 there were four mosques in Panama, in Panama City, Colón, Aguadulce and David (Muhammad, 1997).

Some writers claim that Hezbollah (Shi'a) and Hamas (Sunni) have developed sophisticated but little known financial structures in Panama's Colon Free Trade Zone. Farah notes that there is also evidence to suggest that the international Muslim Brotherhood have established offshore companies in Panama (Farah, 2007).

Muslims live primarily in Panama City and Colón, with a smaller but growing presence in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims are of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent, of which 80 percent identify as Sunni (International Religious Freedom Report, 2010).

### South America

**Argentina:** this country has a Muslim population of approximately 784,000 (Pew Research 2009). The first wave of Muslim immigration to Argentina was between 1880 and 1955. The first Islamic Association was founded in the outskirts of Buenos Aires in 1917, and in 1918 an Islamic center was formed inside the city (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 34).

Argentina has one of the most active Islamic groups in the region. The Islamic Organization of Latin America (IOLA) runs the largest mosque in Latin America (Buenos Aires), which holds events to promote unification of Muslims living in the region and propagation of Islam. In 2003 IOLA sent thirteen young Muslims from Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, Venezuela, Margarita Island, Curacao, Guatemala, Costa Rica and El Salvador to hajj (Connell, 2004, 26).

Descendants of Muslim immigrants have been particularly important in Argentina. Former Argentine President Carlos Menem, born in Argentina of Syrian Muslim parents, converted to Catholicism to become President in 1989 (Connell, 2004, 25).

The two cases of Islamic terrorism in South America have both occurred in Argentina. In 1992 the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was subject to an attack when a suicide bomber drove a car packed full of explosives into the front of the embassy. The attack wounded 242 people and killed 29. Although the case is yet to be officially solved, it is widely considered to be the work of the Iranian-backed Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah (Connell, 2004, 29).

A second attack came two years later in 1994 with a similar method on the Argentina Jewish Mutual Aid Association (AMIA) also located in Buenos Aires. The attack resulted in 87 deaths and over 100 wounded.

Again it is assumed that Hezbollah is responsible, but this case has also never officially been solved (Connell, 2004, 29).

**Brazil:** the Muslim population totals approximately 191,000 (Pew Research 2009). The first Muslim African slaves arrived in Brazil in 1538. The country then experienced similar Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian immigration from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Tres Fronteras have small but significant Arab Muslim communities. The first Muslim charity was founded in 1929. In 1987 the first mosque opened in Foz de Iguazu, and in the early 1990s Sunni and Shi'a Muslims were of an equal number (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 35-6). Today new waves of Muslim immigrants are arriving in Latin America, mainly from West Africa where they flee war and poverty. Most of these Muslims illegally board ships bound for Argentina and Brazil, unaware of their final destination. Brazil's largest refugee population is African (Sills/Baggett, 2011,32).

The 2010 International Report on Religious Freedom on Brazil noted that the Muslim community is overwhelmingly Sunni and almost completely assimilated into broader society. The recent Shi'a immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants who arrived during the past 25 years from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Conversions to Islam increased during the reporting period among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 80 to 120 mosques, Islamic religious centers, and Islamic associations, many of which are inactive.

**Venezuela:** the Muslim population totals approximately 94,000 (Pew Research 2009). Venezuela has fifteen Islamic civic associations in ten states (Jones, 2005). The Muslim community consists primarily of persons of Lebanese and Syrian descent living in Nueva Esparta State and the Caracas area (International Religious Freedom Report, 2010).

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has made nine visits to Tehran, Iran, during his presidency, and Venezuela is an observing member of the Arab League (Sills/Baggett, 2011, 33).

**Colombia:** this country has a Muslim population of approximately 14,000 (Pew Research 2009). The Muslim communities in Colombia are connected with the arrival of Arab immigrants, who have arrived in the country at varying times. Firstly, Muslims arrived after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, secondly after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and thirdly after the breakout of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 (Castellanos, 1).

Recently the Muslim population in Colombia has gained greater visibility, and interest in Islam in general has increased since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. The Muslim community that was once comprised of immigrants is now attracting a significant number of converts, but only in the places where there is an institutional space (Castellanos, 2).

The Muslim community in Bogotá became more popular during and after the 1950s. Islam in Colombia benefited from its image as a religion that generates identity and moral values against the failure of national regimes that had promised democracy, but had produced dictatorship. Until the 1980s almost

all Muslims were Sunni, but due to Syrian and Lebanese immigration in the 1990s there is a Shi'ite presence also. The Islamic Charity of Bogotá is the oldest Islamic organization in the city, which was founded in 1979. There are also Islamic Cultural Centers and mosques that hold religious festivities, and there are now Muslim communities in practically every important city in Colombia (Castellanos, 3-4).

**Ecuador:** the Muslim population totals approximately 2,000 (Pew Research 2009). The first Muslim settlers in Ecuador were primarily Arab traders from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Egypt and congregated mainly in Quito. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many melted into the predominately Roman Catholic society. By the mid-1980s many of the local native Ecuadorian population embraced Islam and the non-profit Centro Islámico del Ecuador was founded in 1994. By the late 1990s Ecuador was also experiencing Muslim immigration from West Africa, mainly Liberia, Nigeria and Ghana (Suquillo, 2002).

**Peru:** the Muslim population totals approximately 1,000 (Pew Research 2009). Muslims in Peru trace their ancestry to the arrival of Spanish invaders. However, Islam in Peru is dominated by Palestinian Arabs who arrived in the 1940s. There are still no mosques in Peru but the Muslim community does have an Asociación Islam del Peru, and a school in Lima (Jones, 2005).

**Bolivia:** the country has a Muslim population of approximately 2,000 (Pew Research 2009). Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, predominantly for Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims have a small but growing community in La Paz (International Religious Freedom Report, 2010).

**Chile:** the Muslim population totals approximately 4,000 (Pew Research 2009). It is known that in the 1865 and 1875 census' there were two 'Turks' living in Chile, with their origins from somewhere in the large Ottoman Empire. By 1885 the number of 'Turks' had risen to 29, although there was no precise information on their faith. However, the census of 1895 registered 76 'Turks' and 58 of those were Muslims, mainly living in North Chile. By 1907 there were 1,498 Muslims all of foreign origin, although in 1920 this number had decreased to 402. The first Islamic institution, the Society of Muslim Union of Chile, was founded in Santiago in 1926; and in 1927 the first Islamic charity was founded. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s there were no religious leaders or centers, instead the small Muslim communities met in homes. In 1990 the construction of the Al-Salam mosque began, which was the first in the country, after which more followed. The majority of Chilean Muslims are Sunni with some Shi'ite members. Some Sufi groups have also arisen, but from a non-Arab Chilean population (Elhamalawy, 2003).

**Paraguay:** the Muslim Population totals approximately 1,000 (Pew Research 2009). **Tri-Border Area:** This is the area along the junction of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina; it is a primary center of commerce but also very difficult to regulate. This area contains an Arab community of approximately 30,000, primarily Lebanese and Syrian immigrants who are involved in business enterprises, both legal and illegal (Connell, 2004, 31). There are claims that Hezbollah and Hamas have a history stretching back several decades, and use the Tri-Border area for fundraising and support. The Lebanese mafia is also known to use the Tri-Border area for their illicit activities (Connell, 2004, 31). Connell quotes a Library of Congress report on the Tri-Border area, which notes that various Islamic terrorist groups use the Tri-Border area

for drug trafficking, money-laundering and other activities in support of their organizations (Connell, 2004, 32).

**Uruguay:** the Muslim population totals approximately 1,000 (Pew Research 2009). The Egyptian Islamic Center in Montevideo, which is supported by the Egyptian embassy, was the first mosque in the country. Muslims also gather to pray at the Uruguay Islamic Center in Canelones (International Religious Freedom Report, 2010).

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