

VISIT OF PROFESSOR AKBAR AHMED TO EDINBURGH

17 June 2013

To discuss his new book *The Thistle and the Drone*

**Introduction by Professor Hugh Goddard
(Director of the Alwaleed Centre)**

Welcome to you all to this special session arranged by the Alwaleed Centre in the University of Edinburgh, in conjunction with the Asia-Scotland Institute, to discuss Prof Akbar Ahmed's new book *The Thistle and the Drone* (of which copies are available for sale outside and at the reception afterwards, thanks to Blackwells bookshop); and a special welcome to the author, Prof Ahmed himself, who is here in Edinburgh from his regular base in Washington DC.

Prof Ahmed is a many of many parts, with many streams to his career. Let me mention 3 in particular:

- 1) **TV presenter:** some may remember his TV series for the BBC, 'Living Islam', which was presented in 6 parts back in 1996, and the accompanying book which had the intriguing subtitle: 'From Samarkand to Stornoway', a title which indicates a full awareness, which is not true of all who write about Islam in the Contemporary World, of the Muslim presence here in Scotland.
- 2) **Diplomat and civil servant:** Prof Ahmed has also had a distinguished career in government in Pakistan, having joined the civil service there in 1966, and served in many different posts in both former west and east Pakistan, including as Commissioner in Baluchistan province, in South Waziristan, and also including a period spent as High Commissioner for Pakistan in London (from 1999-2000).
- 3) **Academic and author:** Prof Ahmed has a number of books to his name, some of which will be referred to in more detail later, and has taught in a number of universities, including the University of Cambridge in the UK and, currently, in American University in Washington DC. His most recent books are *Journey into Islam: the crisis of globalization* (2007), an account of a journey across the World of Islam (the Middle East, South Asia and South-East Asia) with some of his American students, and *Journey into America: the challenge of Islam* (2010), an account of a journey across America with the next generation of his research students, to investigate the huge variety which is found within the Muslim communities of the USA. These two books make an interesting pair, and the book under discussion tonight is actually, with them, the third part of a trilogy on the relationship between America and the Muslim World.

The form of the evening is that Prof Ahmed is going to speak for 25-30 minutes about the book. There will then be two 5-7 minute responses,

from Dr Crispin Bates, the Director of the university's Centre for South Asian Studies and myself, Hugh Goddard (the Director of the Alwaleed Centre), and there will then be up to half an hour for Q and A and discussion before we move across the square to No 19 George Square for a drinks reception, to which you are all warmly invited.