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Pioneers

Mazhar Krasniqi (1931-)

New Zealand's first national Muslim community leader

Mazhar Krasniqi (b. 1931), is a New Zealand Muslim community leader of Kosovar-Albanian descent. He was the first president of the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) in 1979.

Mazhar Shukri Krasniqi, son of Shukri Krasniqi and Aisha Minushi, was born on 17 October 1931 in Priština, Kosovo. In 1950 he fled the oppressive Communist regime and sailed for New Zealand on board the refugee boat SS Goya. He arrived penniless in Wellington on 1 May 1951 and started to work at a variety of jobs throughout the decade including farming in Southland, and steam drilling around the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions.

On 1 January 1956 he attended the '1st Moslem Congress' organised by the nascent New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA) and became an extremely active member of the Executive Committee, of which he remained a member up to his retirement in 1992. He served as president twice, in 1975 and again in 1987.



Sheikh Airof, Imam of Ponsonby Mosque (Auckland, New Zealand), and Mazhar Shukri Krasniqi, Q.S.M. Venue: Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ), 16 November 2005, Parliament House, Wellington, New Zealand.

In 1960 Krasniqi set up a restaurant named the 'Albania' in Panmure where he became a very successful and prosperous businessman. In 1970 he opened a kiosk at the new Panmure 'Swimarama', and later set up the 'New Zealand Middle East Export Company' and also a waterbed business.

In 1965 Krasniqi attended an important international conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, as the NZMA delegate over 17 to 24 April, performed the Umrah (Lesser Pilgrimage to Mecca) and even brought back with him a 38 page document entitled the "Resolutions by General Islamic Conference; Second Session" as a souvenir. He extended

his stay and made some important contacts with a number of Arabs and expatriate Albanians there who were keen on importing halal meat from New Zealand.

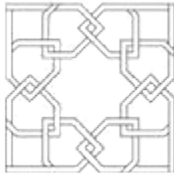
In the 1970s Krasniqi developed extensive contacts with Muslim embassies in Wellington and Canberra, and continued to attend overseas conferences and events on behalf of the New Zealand Muslim community. He was also present at the foundation stone laying ceremony for New Zealand's first mosque on 30 March 1979. The Mosque Committee members - Mazhar Krasniqi, Abdul Rahim Rasheed, Said



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Alvi, Mohammed Yakub Patel and Mohammed Hussein Sahib - all mortgaged their own houses to raise the necessary cash to complete the financial commitment needed by the builder. Further construction work for the hall extension was started in 1987 when Krasniqi was president of the NZMA.

Following the foundation ceremony for the first mosque in New Zealand, Mazhar Krasniqi went on to become the first president of the first national Muslim organisation, the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ). He was elected to the top post on 15 April 1979. The meeting was in fact actually held at the 17 Vermont Street property just weeks before work was to begin on building the mosque.

Late in 1980, Hajji Muhammad Ali Hrakan, General Secretary of the authoritative Muslim World League (Rabitah Al-Alam Al-Islami), granted 'Rayes' (Arabic for 'commander') Mazhar Shukri Krasniqi the right to issue halal certificates to export meat and food to Saudi Arabia. Five years later, with Dr Ashraf Choudhary as president of FIANZ, and after extensive negotiations with the New Zealand Meat Producers Board, a formal contract was arranged. Krasniqi was appointed the first FIANZ North Island Halal Supervisor on 16 September 1985. His work took him regularly to Wairoa, Oahu and Morewa. He resigned in 1986.

During the 1992 NZMA AGM Mazhar Shukri Krasniqi was appointed Patron. The following year Krasniqi left community politics, and retired from both the NZMA and FIANZ.



Mazhar Krasniqi (front), at a 2000 rally in Aotea Square.

During the 1999 Kosovo crisis (when the Serbs expelled over one million Albanian Muslims from their homes in Kosovo), Krasniqi persuaded the government to immediately accept 650 Albanian refugees into New Zealand. On 1 April 1999 the New Zealand Albanian Civic League, of which Krasniqi was president, organised a march and demonstration in central Auckland to express their support for the US-led NATO bombing of Serbia.

On 31 December 2002 the Governor-General of New Zealand bestowed the Queen's Service Medal (QSM) for public service on Mazhar Krasniqi for his decades of community service to both the Albanian and wider Muslim communities.

In 2005 the New Delhi, India, based Institute of Objective Studies released book entitled 100 Great Muslims of the 20th Century that identified the inaugural president of FIANZ, Mazhar Krasniqi, among them.

By Abdullah Drury

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