

Ambassador Akbar Ahmed: Bio

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Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University in Washington DC, was the High Commissioner of Pakistan to Great Britain. He has advised Prince Charles and met with President George W. Bush, General David Petraeus and Secretary Michael Chertoff on Islam. His numerous books, films and documentaries have won awards and his books have been translated into many languages including Chinese and Indonesian. Ahmed is “the world’s leading authority on contemporary Islam” according to the BBC.

Ahmed was appointed in September 2008 as the first Distinguished Chair for Middle East/Islamic Studies at the US Naval Academy, Annapolis, in addition to the Ibn Khaldun Chair at American University. From Fall 2009 onwards he was appointed Distinguished Visiting Affiliate at the US Naval Academy and he has been Non-Resident Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution for several years.

Education:

Ahmed has been Visiting Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and has taught at Princeton, Harvard and Cambridge Universities. Ahmed was awarded the Honorary Doctor of Laws by the University of Liverpool, received his PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, MA and Diploma in Education from Cambridge University, and Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honors) from Birmingham University.

Current Project:

Ahmed was on sabbatical from 2008 through to 2009 conducting a study of American society through the experiences of the Muslim community. He toured the United States with his American assistants and their journey with accompanying film footage can be seen on journeyintoamerica.wordpress.com. A film, *Journey Into America*, and a book, *Journey Into America: The Challenge of Islam*, contain the findings. The film has been shown in film festivals and the book is the lead title in the 2010 Brookings catalogue (“I have not read a work as insightful, erudite, and innovative on the challenge of American identity since Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*”, Melody Fox, Berkley Center at Georgetown University).

Recent Publications:

Ahmed’s book *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization* is published by the Brookings Institution Press (“Book of the Week,” “The Colors of Allah,” review by Edward Mortimer June 23, *Guardian*; “Washington policy-makers and journalists should read this book,” review by Tony Blankley, *The Washington Times*, June 20; “a fascinating read,” Tavis Smiley on the *Tavis Smiley Show*; “utterly readable book and really quite gripping ... why are there not more Akbar Ahmeds?” Milt Rosenberg on the *Milt Rosenberg Show*; “a deeply moral work ... which confirms Ahmed’s position as preeminent Muslim public intellectual”, review by Professor Tamara Sonn, *Emel* magazine, September). It was the No. 1 Book of the Year for *The Globalist*. The Interfaith Conference of Richmond has published a six-week course as a Guide to understanding Islam based on *Journey into Islam*. His book with Aminah Hoti, *Knowledge: Why Civilizations Rise and Fall*, is with Polity Press, Cambridge.

Ahmed's chapter "The Clash of Civilizations?" is in *Debating the War of Ideas* edited by E.D. Patterson and J. Gallagher, Macmillan, 2009. "Swat in the Eye of the Storm: Interview with Akbar Ahmed" is featured in *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 25, No. 5, in October 2009. Earlier *Anthropology Today* published "Islam in Today's World: A Conversation with Akbar Ahmed", Vol. 23, No. 1, in February 2007. Ahmed's article "Talking Can Stop Hate" was featured as the "Big Idea!" in AARP the Magazine, in the March/April 2007 issue and "Bush Still Doesn't Get It" featured in the Outlook section of the *Washington Post* (July 22, 2007).

Ahmed's play, *Noor*, was part of the summer Festival at Theater J in Washington, DC in 2007 ("Akbar Ahmed's 'Noor,' A Paean to Religious Tolerance," by Ted Merwin, *Washington Post*, July 26). *Noor* was performed at the Katzen Arts Center in November 2007 to full houses and was seen again at the Washington Hebrew Congregation in April 2008 (Saqi Books, London, 2009). His *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* (published by The Buxton Initiative, Washington DC, *Pakistan Link*, 2008 and along with *Noor* by Saqi Books, London, 2009) has been performed on several stages ("I thought both the play itself and the performance made for one of the most stunning, enriching theater performances that I have seen here in my three decades in Washington. It was a true case of time travel and mind travel, executed exceedingly well, including the costumes which made the audience travel to a far-away place. I know it can be hard to break through with a play -- but the entire cast and you yourself should be extremely proud of what you have created ensemble". Stephan Richter, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *The Globalist*.). His "memoir monologue," *Waziristan to Washington: A Muslim at the Crossroads*, was first performed by him at the Washington DC, Jewish Community Center, Dialogues and Public Affairs, on August 22 and October 2, and the Katzen Arts Center on December 18, 2008, and at Theater J on March 23, 2009. He is also working on *Gandhi and Jinnah Return Home* and *Babar the Tiger*.

Media:

Ahmed is regularly interviewed on CNN, CBC, the BBC, ARY TV and has appeared several times on the Oprah Winfrey Show and Night Line. Ahmed appeared on the Sir David Frost Show (along with Lord Owen) on Al Jazeera and also Newsnight for the Annual Review 2007.

He presented and narrated "Living Islam", the six-part BBC television series, in 1993 and "The Glories of Islamic Art", the three-part television series for Channel 5, UK, broadcast in 2006. He initiated, developed and completed "The Jinnah Quartet" – a feature film, a documentary and two books on M.A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Ahmed is Consultant and interviewed for "Rumi Returning", a major television film on the mystic poet. He is an expert panelist with the new online feature, "On Faith," for the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*. He has recorded 12 lectures for an audio CD series, "Encountering Islam", for NowYouKnow Media, Washington DC and is Senior Advisor to an innovative on-line project for an Islamic syllabus for Jones Knowledge Inc. He is on the Advisory Board of *The Globalist* and is on the Board of Directors for Interfaith Voices, a public radio show. Ahmed is working with his son Babar Ahmed on the feature film *24,000*.

Distinctions/ Distinguished Lectures:

Ahmed was awarded the Star of Excellence, one of Pakistan's highest honors and the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal by the Royal Society for Asian Affairs in London. In 2005 the National Cathedral held a special Evensong Service to honor Ahmed, he was given the First Annual Bridge Builder's Award from the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington and he received the "Humanitarian Award", the highest honor of the Chapel of Four Chaplains. In 2004 he was given the Professor of the Year Award for Washington DC by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of

Education and the first Gandhi Center Fellowship of Peace Award and invited to join the World Wisdom Council. He delivered the Keynote Address at the Annual Conference of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions at Monterrey, Mexico, September 23, 2007. In early 2008 Ahmed joined the Global Advisory Council of PlayPumps International.

Ahmed is Centennial Honorary Chair of the Washington National Cathedral Centennial Celebration (along with Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor). He has been a Trustee since 2001 of the World Faiths Development Dialogue set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the President of the World Bank and is a Trustee on the Board of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. He was founding member of the First Abrahamic Summit, Washington DC, and continues to be a member of the Abrahamic Roundtable, organized by the National Cathedral.

Ahmed is on the Board of Directors, Hollings Center, and member, Abrahamic Program Advisory Committee, Chautauqua Institution. He is a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Hasan Family Foundation and was a Senior Fellow of The Case Foundation. He spoke at the Chairman's Distinguished Speakers Lecture Series at the Pentagon and gave the inaugural lectures for the first Chair in Jewish-Muslim Studies at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Along with Ambassador Doug Holladay he founded the Buxton Initiative for Dialogue. He lectured at a World Affairs Council event along with Dick Cheney, Dr. Henry Kissinger and Bernard Lewis. He was Member Host Committee for *Internews'* 25th anniversary celebration in May 2007. He was the first Muslim to lecture at the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC and was Principal Investigator for "Islam in the Age of Globalization", a project supported by The Brookings Institution, American University and The Pew Research Center, and Visiting Fellow at Brookings in addition to his appointment at American University. In November, he and Dr. Judea Pearl delivered the Keynote Address at the Greater Kansas City Festival of Faiths in The Village Church.

Ahmed delivered the Keynote Address at a Conference on "The Way Forward" at the Centre for Muslim-Jewish Relations, Cambridge, the Keynote Address at the 60th Anniversary of the Independence of India and Pakistan, hosted by the University of Southampton, gave a special lecture at the London School of Economics and was invited as an "expert" to address the All-Parties Committee on Terrorism at the House of Commons in the summer of 2007. He has been invited to present the Keynote at the Drury University, Convention Series, 2007-08 and the McMurrin Lecture in Religion and Culture, University of Utah, Tanner Humanities Center, 2008-09. He will give the President's Distinguished Lecture at the University of Vermont in 2008. Ahmed is listed in the Recommended Speakers Book of the World Affairs Council of America. He is one of the 138 Muslim leaders who wrote recently to the Pope and other Christian leaders suggesting dialogue. Ahmed was one of the original signatories of the Muslim letter to Jewish leaders circulated in 2008.

Ahmed led a Muslim delegation to the Holocaust Museum in December 2006, attended President Ford's funeral ceremony at the National Cathedral where he was part of the "Procession Order" as "Representative of Faith" escorting the casket, and delivered the invocation at the Mayor's Inaugural Prayer Service in Washington DC. He was given the "Key" to the city of Houston and Portland, Maine, by the respective Mayors. He is a member of the "Incident Management Team" for the Department of Homeland Security and was mentioned in "Congressional Record – Proceedings and Debates of the 109th Congress, Second Session, Washington, Friday, September 29, 2006, House of Representatives: "Tribute to Dr. Judea Pearl and Dr. Akbar Ahmed". Along with Dr. Judea Pearl, Ahmed was finalist in the "Most Inspiring Person of the Year 2005" poll conducted by BeliefNet and was awarded the first ever "Purpose Prize Award" in 2006.

Ahmed and his family were honored at the National Cathedral in the Fall: "We are delighted to be honoring you and your family at the 29th InterFaith Concert at the Washington

National Cathedral on Tuesday, November 18, 2008... The Concert is a great celebration of the sacred in song, dance and chant of 9 world religions... this is the first time we have ever honored a family! What better choice could we have made?! Our Board of Directors clearly answered that question!" Rev. Clark Lobenstine, Executive Director, InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. Ahmed received the 2008 Rumi Peace and Dialogue Award and will be given the annual Abraham Joshua Herschel/ Martin Luther King, Jr. Award for Interfaith Activism on January 19, 2009 (King's birthday) at the Park Avenue Christian Church, New York.

May, 2010

On Akbar Ahmed

- Professor Akbar Ahmed the world's leading authority on contemporary Islam." **BBC, Radio 2, "Good Morning Sunday", October 24, 2004.**
- "First of all thank you Professor Ahmed. I just wanted to publicly express my thanks and my deep appreciation. You have done more than any single individual I know building bridges between Muslims, Jews, Christians here in the United States and elsewhere, and for establishing bridges between Israel and its Middle Eastern neighbors, and we and the state of Israel are deeply appreciative of your efforts." **Ambassador Michael Oren at American University, Washington DC, April 22, 2010.**
- "In the field, with military and civilian teams and local people in locations across Afghanistan and Pakistan at various times through the next three years, the wisdom of Ahmed's insight came home to me again and again." **David Kilcullen in *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, 2009, (Chapter 4, "Terrain, Tribes, and Terrorists": Conflicts from Indonesia to Europe, page 226).**
- "The leading authority on contemporary Islam." *The Sunday Times Magazine*. "**Relative Values**" by Sue Fox, **July 27, 2008.**
- "His voice needs to be heard, and his courage strengthened." **Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace laureate, cover *Journey into Islam*, 2007.**
- "My first meeting with Dr. Ahmed was some ten years ago when I was Archbishop of Canterbury and Akbar was the High Commissioner of Pakistan to the UK. I was bowled over by our meeting. Here was a distinguished scholar in Anthropology and expert in Islam, eager to forward warm relationships between Christianity and Islam! We began a firm friendship that day; a friendship that has deepened into deep collegueship in a number of inter-faith collaboration. I am delighted to offer this tribute as the 29th InterFaith Concert honors him tonight. He is a devoted humanitarian and a fine human being. Eileen and I only wish we could be with you to share in the rejoicing!
Akbar, be in no doubt of the significant role you are playing in our needy world." **Right Reverend and Right Honorable Lord Carey of Clifton, 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury, November 2008.**
- "Akbar Ahmed is one of the great contemporary exponents of Islam, a man I admire as a scholar and cherish as a friend. He is a role-model of reason in an age of anxiety, a voice of

tolerance at a time of tension, and an avatar of hope when all too many are tempted by despair. We need to recognise the courage of a man like Akbar, the breadth of his intellectual horizons, and the generosity of his spirit, for there are all too few in the world's great religious faiths prepared to take the risk of moderation in an age of extremes, and they represent religion at its highest. True faith does not fear; and true love of God extends beyond boundaries, inclusive in its embrace. May he continue to be blessed and be a blessing in all he does.” **Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, November 2008.**

- “He is one of the few people in the world today who can interpret the one to the other from a position of affection for both East and West. Of his many gifts and talents he is a peacemaker in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Desmond Tutu.” **The Rt. Rev. James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, CMJR, Cambridge website, 2007.**
- “Dr Akbar Ahmed deserves to win the Nobel Peace Prize. He is one of the great peacemakers in the world today. I place him along with the Dalai Lama and Gandhi.” **Jan Du Plain, “On Faith,” Washington Post/Newsweek online comment, 2007.**
- “Thank you for the wisdom and generosity of spirit you are constantly showing through your spoken and written words. I cannot tell you how important your voice is right now. These are fateful times - and in you classic Islam has a spokesman and role model of supreme grace and dignity. May God/Allah be with you in all you do - and I thank you from the depth of my heart.” **Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the UK, correspondence in 2005.**
- “Finally, I have dedicated the book to three colleagues and friends who over the years have enriched my understanding of Arab and Muslim thought beyond any capacity for measurement. Akbar Ahmed embodies all one could hope for in a man of ideas and a guide in matters both academic and moral, and his heartfelt attachment to interfaith dialogue is matched only by his unrivaled generosity of spirit.” **Professor Lawrence Rosen, dedication, *Varieties of Muslim Experience: Encounters with Arab Political and Cultural Life*, 2008.**
- “I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Akbar Ahmed for planting some of the book's central ideas on the power of dialogue and the goal of mutual understanding as antidotes to clashes among civilizations, cultures, religions, nations, tribes, and individuals. He is an inspiring friend, an eloquent scholar of remarkable scope and depth, and a tireless warrior in the noble campaign to find lasting alternatives to war and solutions to the sources of alienation that breed terrorism. He has persuaded me that we need not consign ourselves to self-fulfilling prophecies of doom as inevitable, that if we must be in the business of making self-fulfilling prophecies it will be much more sensible to commit ourselves to healthy ones, while remaining vigilant to the reality of living in a world that includes dangerous fanatics.” **Professor Brian Forst, *Terrorism, Crime, and Public Policy*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.**
- “Ambassador Douglas Holladay, Co-Chairman of the Buxton Initiative, spoke of the work of his good friend and colleague, Dr. Akbar Ahmed: “Akbar is God’s gift to America.” [In response Charge d’ Affaires Aslam Khan of Pakistan later referred to Dr. Ahmed as his

country's "great gift to America."]. **Kaitlin Peterson on Buxton Dialogue, *Pakistan Link*, April 8, 2008.**

- "I would like to second all the thanks and acknowledgments that my friend and dialogue partner, Akbar Ahmed has made in his last posting on this thread. The only problem I have dialoguing with Akbar is being unable to match his generosity, his friendship and his wisdom." **Concluding remarks by Professor Judea Pearl after Jewish-Muslim dialogue with Professor Akbar Ahmed on *BeliefNet*, May 9, 2008.**
- "Saint Francis University has several minors, one of the students favorites is in 'Social Responsibility'. 'Social Responsibility: a minor with a Conscience' is the slogan on our t-shirt. When I was in Egypt this past summer I noticed that we did not have a single Muslim among the many heroes of peace and justice on the back of the shirt. We have the Dalai Lama, Saint Francis, Dorothy Day, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and many others. I don't know how we left off Malcolm X. I am certain the Ambassador never expected to be nominated to be placed on a t-shirt tonight, but I am going to suggest that when we do the next version, Akbar Ahmed be among the heroes. He is truly one of the great voices on the planet calling for peace, compassion, and justice." **Professor Michael McKale, St. Francis University Ethics Lecture. Introduction. 2008.**
- "Professor Akbar Ahmed [has] always been a man of action apart from being acknowledged as the foremost Islamic thinker and scholar." **Syed Arif Hussaini, "The Trial of Dara Shikoh – a Thought Provoking Play," column, *Pakistan Link*, April 2008.**
- "The main motivation behind this special number was the thought that, usually, journals devote special numbers to the contribution of scholars not in their life time. This journal feels strongly that such contributions should be recognized while the scholar is alive and still productive. This is the first special issue in the series of such numbers we have planned to bring out in the future... The material in this number has been chosen in such a way that the readers are able to know and appreciate not only the multi faceted personality of Akbar Ahmed but also the amazing range of his contributions." **Editor, *Islam and Muslim Societies: A Social Science Journal*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2007. Special Number: Akbar Ahmed's Journey into Islam.**
- "Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, holder of the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University, has written a profoundly personal and moving analysis... The author is a social scientist with the soul of a poet who has probably done more than any other scholar resident in the West to combat the egregious stereotypes and hate-mongering that are all too common in public-policy circles today... readers of this book may rejoice that such an individual moves among us." **Antony T. Sullivan, book review, *Middle East Policy Council Journal*, Volume XV, Spring 2008, Number 1.**
- "I deem it a distinct honor to be part of your noble endeavors. You are truly a north star, an international Muslim icon and a living legend that entire Muslim Umma is proud of your rich contributions for promoting Muslim image, interfaith understanding and harmony." **Dr. Ashraf Abbasi, Chairman, Pakistani American Congress, USA.**

- “Our guest is probably one of the world’s best known scholars on Islam. You speak of education, you have just given us an education. Thank you.” **Dennis Wholey, “This is America”, PBS, December 13, 2007.**
- “I genuinely hope you will consider a return trip in the future with your friends and family, and I hope you will allow us to call on you from time to time for advice and counsel. We are deeply grateful to you for the rich, intelligent and soulful presentation. Your recorded lecture is wildly popular.” **Thomas Becker, President, Chautauqua Institution, August 7, 2007.**
- “Professor Ahmed has been described as building bridges of understanding where others build walls of fear, and it is for his wisdom, his unfaltering moral compass, and his selfless contribution to the drive for dialogue and friendship between peoples of different backgrounds that we honour him. In a world that is getting ever smaller it is a contribution that was never more important than it is today ... Chancellor, in the name of the Council and Senate I present to you for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, in this University, Akbar Ahmed.” **Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Christopher Gaskell on conferment of honorary Doctorate of Laws, University of Liverpool, July 6, 2007.**
- “Akbar Ahmed, the leading Islamic scholar in the world.” **Channel 5 TV, UK.**
- “Tony Blair would do well to listen to Akbar Ahmed, one of the world’s leading authorities on Islam, when he takes up his new role as Middle East envoy in earnest.” **Anthea Lipsett, Education Guardian, June 28, 2007.**
- “The leading thinker and scholar of contemporary Islam, Professor Akbar Ahmed.” **Jewish Chronicle, UK, November 16, 2006.**
- “Professor Ahmed... a world authority on the subject” in “Islam’s Heritage, Christianity’s Future” by Judith Bumpus, **The Art Newspaper, Vol. XVI, February 2007.**
- Akbar Ahmed one of “three of Pakistan’s greatest diplomats”, **page IX, Shameful Flight, by Stanley Wolpert, 2006.**
- “Professor Akbar S Ahmed, arguably one of the most distinguished scholars that Pakistan has produced and certainly the only one with credibility in the West.” **Shahed Sadullah, The News, July 7, 2007.**
- “Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to speak at the Joint Staff Distinguished Speakers Lecture Series on August 9, 2005. Your poignant remarks and expert perspective provided the military and civilian audience a greater understanding of Islam and its relationship with the Western world. You will be pleased to know the feedback I received gave you outstanding reviews for your informative lecture.” **General Myers while Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff.**
- “I would like to thank you for helping to make our panel such a success ... I was delighted to have the opportunity to hear you and your colleagues express so eloquently the importance of interfaith dialogue and understanding.” **Karen Hughes, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, May 3, 2006.**

- “One of the most distinguished Muslim scholars today ... Professor Ahmed comes with impeccable credentials.” **Lord George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. *Pakistan Link*, January 9, 2004.**
- One of the UK’s leading Muslim magazines, had a feature story with illustrations and called him “the new Ibn Khaldun.” *Emel*, Nov/Dec 2004.
- “Prof Akbar Ahmed, hailed long time ago as the most notable Muslim anthropologist since the legendary Ibn Khaldun.” “Commentary,” **Ambassador Ghori, *Pakistan Link*, June 2, 2005.**
- “He is my teacher and my friend; we have traveled and spoken together on numerous occasions ... His unfaltering moral compass has led him to many nations to speak on behalf of religious tolerance and human dignity. His courage is the only thing that equals that conviction for often his position has placed his safety in jeopardy, but he continues to travel the globe to bring peace and understanding ... I am honored as a rabbi and teacher here in Washington to have Dr. Ahmed join us, but even more, as the child of a survivor, I am so thankful that Akbar’s life work honors the memory of all who were lost due to hatred. May he continue to be blessed in his work and go from strength to strength.” **Bruce Lustig, Senior Rabbi of Washington Hebrew Congregation, June 17, 2006.**
- “Thank you for speaking at the Council’s Eleventh National Conference. You helped make it our best one yet. Council members appreciated the opportunity to hear your insights and interact with you. It was great to have you here. Thank you **for doing this.**” **Ambassador Richard Haass, President, Council on Foreign Relations, June 16, 2006.**
- “I just completed the evaluation and you were the speaker the respondents liked best. Now that is an honor. Congratulations.” **Dr. Karen Collias, Program Director, World Affairs Council of Philadelphia**, wrote on June 24, 2006, after the conference in which he spoke alongside Richard Cheney, Vice President of the United States, Dr. Henry Kissinger and Professor Bernard Lewis.
- “The Committee is interested in your perspective as a highly respected Islamic scholar on the current struggle within Islam among moderates and more extreme factions, and its historical underpinnings. We also would like to hear your views on how the United States can approach building a closer, more productive long term relationship with Muslim populations worldwide.” **Senator Richard G. Lugar, Chairman, The Senate Foreign Relations Committee**, invited him to offer his “testimony,” **July 18, 2006.**
- “Akbar Ahmed – Judea Pearl dialogue at Hamilton.” “Ibn Khaldun once said ‘He who finds a new path is a pathfinder, even if the trail has to be found again by others; and he who walks far ahead of his contemporaries is a leader, even though centuries pass before he is recognized as such.’ Ibn Khaldun was talking about people like you. You are a pathfinder. By leading Jews and Muslims on the path toward greater mutual understanding, you walk far ahead of the world we live in, a world plagued on all sides by needless hatred. It may be a long time before Jews and Muslims learn to walk with each other on the path of peace and love. Be that as it may, you will be remembered in the future for being a pathfinder. It is my prayer that our world catches up with you speedily and in our lifetime.

I know very little Arabic, but I know enough to say to you SHOOK-RAHN. Thank you, Dr. Ahmed, thank you very much.” **“Thank You Speech” by Leslie Lasky, President of the Greater Hamilton Jewish Federation, Hamilton Canada, November 12, 2006.**