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PRESS RELEASE

**Visit of Shaikh Saleh bin Mohammed Al-Talib,
Imam of the Grand Mosque of Makkah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Following on the heels of the landmark visit of the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League to New Zealand in November last year, Shaikh Saleh bin Mohammed Al-Talib, one of the Imams (Religious Leaders) of the Grand Mosque in the Holy city of Makkah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will be visiting New Zealand from 23-25 May 2014.

As the place to which Muslims travel for the Hajj, Makkah is a place of profound significance to all Muslims and this is the first visit of one of the Imams of Makkah to New Zealand. During his time with us, Shaikh Saleh will lead the Friday congregational prayer at Masjid Umar in Mt Roskill, Auckland and meet community leaders there. Later, Shaikh Saleh will be received in Hamilton by Dr Anwar Ghani, President of Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ). While in Hamilton, Shaikh Saleh will be given a tour of the newly established Early Childhood Centre, funded in part by the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah. He will then be the guest of honour at a dinner to be hosted by Dr Anwar Ghani where he will meet and mingle with community leaders and youths.

Shaikh Saleh will also be given a tour of the proposed FIANZ Intercultural Centre and a Primary School to be located in Pakuranga, a prestigious project undertaken by FIANZ with generous support from HRH King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. He will conclude his visit to New Zealand by leading the mid-day prayer at At-Taqwa Islamic Centre.

That such a high profile visit is taking place so soon after the previous one signals the importance of New Zealand to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In recent times, the relationship between the Kingdom and New Zealand has seen exceptional growth – a growth that has worked in both directions. There has been a steady increase in the export of meat and dairy products from New Zealand and, in the last couple of years, the Saudi student population in New Zealand has also seen a considerable increase.

It is heartening to note the significant role that the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) is able to play in enhancing the already warm relationship between the Kingdom and New Zealand. The facilitation of the past visit by the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League and the current visit of Shaikh Saleh to New Zealand, are testament to that ability. The reputation of the New Zealand Muslim community as being active and forward-looking was both commented on and reported by the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League. In that light we are indeed grateful to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, HRH King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud for his generosity in sending such high-powered visitors to our shores

On behalf of the Muslim community in New Zealand, together with Saudi Consul-General HE Ahmad Al-Johani the Federation is greatly honoured to host the visit of Shaikh Saleh bin Mohammed Al-Talib to New Zealand.

End

**DR ANWAR GHANI
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A United and Progressive Community