

A new Moslem body to cater for all races

By CHRISTOPHER WOOD

Leaders of Hongkong's 50,000-strong Moslem community are worried that their Islamic way of life may be threatened by Hongkong's brand of materialism.

To counter such fears, they have formed the United Moslem Association of Hongkong, a non-political body whose aims are the promotion of the religious, educational, cultural, social and economic welfare of all Moslems.

Officers of the association have been elected and it is now planned to launch a membership drive. The association is the first Islamic body in Hongkong to draw members from all nationalities — there are some 35,000 Chinese Moslems in Hongkong — and the prime reason for its establishment was to allow followers of the same religion to speak with one voice.

The honorary secretary, Mr K. Rahmani, told the SCM Post in an interview that one of the first priorities of the association would be education.

He said: "We will approach the Education Department for help in establishing a primary school with a teacher to instruct in Islam.

"The rest of the curriculum would be normal as we want to stay in the mainstream of the education system.

"Currently, our children are at Christian schools. They learn about Christianity and not about their own religion.

"We are worried that Islam may be dying, given a new generation. With Hongkong's materialism, that is always a possibility."

This did not mean that they were planning to turn their backs on the rest of the community, said Mr Rahmani, who is a senior engineer with the Public Works Department.

"We don't want to be inward-looking — we want to play our full part — we just want to retain our identity."

Part of the association's role would be to promote the teachings of the Koran and their application in everyday life.

Some of these, for example, the condemnation of usury, could lead to practical conflicts.

Hongkong Moslems have been raising funds to build a new Kowloon mosque. The old one, on the corner of Nathan Road and Haiphong Road, was demolished last year after it was declared dangerous.

(The Kowloon Mosque Reconstruction Fund-Raising Committee has since submitted a claim for more than \$1.5 million in compensation from the Mass Transit Railway Corp, for damage it claims was caused to the mosque by an MTR construction site).

Mr Rahmani recounted how \$2 million raised by the fund is sitting in a current account, not earning any interest.

"At one stage we considered putting it on deposit, but one of our members asked: 'How much money are you losing?'"

"We told him \$200,000, or whatever, and he paid the fund the equivalent sum and the money stayed in the current account."

To make sure the association works effectively, committee members have already been allocated specific areas of responsibility, whether in women's affairs, religious affairs, education or even business or legal advice.

One point, he stressed, was that the association would not infringe on the activities of national Islamic organisations in Hongkong.

Rather they should be complementary. Mr Rahmani, who is a Pakistani, said he hoped that the Chinese Moslems would play a full part in the association.

"Since they are in the majority they should be running it."