



# WardheerNews

NEWS FROM AFAR!

## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR OF UMMA UNIVERSITY

By WardheerNews  
August 18, 2016

---

*Editor's Note: Umma University, a prestigious institution of higher learning having all the hallmarks of secular and Islamic-based education is now a force to reckon with after its establishment in 1997-thirty four years after Kenya attained independence from England on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 1963. If "a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step", Umma University's first concrete block that was laid down nineteen years ago by committed educational aspirants, has transformed into an institution of international repute rivaling other educational forces that once prided to be Kenya's towering national academic treasures. In an interview with Dr. Mohamed Karama, Umma University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, WardheerNews is pleased to share with its esteemed readers, a great discussion that touches on various issues of profound importance. The interview was conducted for WardheerNews by Adan Makina and Abdelkarim A. Hassan.*

-----

**WardheerNews (WDN): Dr. Mohamed Karama. It's an honor to welcome you to WardheerNews. Before we begin our interview discussions, could you please share with us your academic background, experience and your area of expertise?**

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), Dr. Mohamed Karama:** I qualified in 1973 as a Public Health Officer from the Royal Society of Health in England. Thereafter, I studied briefly in Nigeria, Malaysia, and Japan. Then I did my Master's and finally wrapped up my PhD in 2002. I worked at the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) for more than 40 years. I worked as a lecturer in many universities in Kenya. I also teach students



from the U.S.A and Japan through International student programs. My area of expertise is Public Health and Epidemiology, and supervising and monitoring students at the Master's and PhD levels.

**WDN: What was the major reason behind Umma University's establishment, its initial foundation as an institution of higher learning and when was it founded?**

**DVC:** Kenya had few public universities until a few years ago. Only a few students with qualifications in secondary education would get a chance to further their education.

Among the universities that were established later as private, most of them were faith-based. Muslims also wanted to have their own university that would provide education for their people and courses that answered to their spiritual needs.



Umma University faculty and administration with Abdelkarim Hassan

Umma University was founded in 1997 as Thika College for Sharia and Islamic Studies which was accredited by the Ministry of Education in 2001 to offer diploma courses in

Sharia and Islamic Studies. In 2007 it was affiliated to International University of Africa, Sudan to offer BA in Sharia and BA in Islamic studies. This experience of being able to run these two degree programmes gave the Muslim Community Leaders both the confidence and resolve to start the establishment of an Islamic-based university in the country.

**WDN: There are many unregulated schools established for the sole purpose of for-profit. How would you rate the overall institutions of higher education in Kenya, both private and public sectors and what makes Umma University a unique institution?**

**DVC:** Kenya has a very strict and standard procedure for the establishment of institutions of higher learning overseen by a body known as the Commission for University Education. In addition, all Professional courses have to be approved by professional councils. Institutions that do not follow this do not get recognition and their graduates may not be easily absorbed into the Kenyan job market. [Umma University](#) fulfills Vision 2030 goals through appropriate skills development

Higher education is one of the key pillars enlisted to transform Kenya into a "newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean and secure environment.

However, with the increasing number of tertiary education institutions to help the country achieve this dream, questions have been raised on whether graduates churned out have practical job market skills as well as character and morals to help raise an all-round and cohesive society. The quality of skills gained has at times been in question. This is because a large number of university students, since time immemorial, have always had a bad reputation, being associated with vices like drugs, moral decadence, among other rogue activities.

Umma University, formerly Thika College for Shania and Islamic Studies, is here to make a difference. The University, which is on the path of being chartered, prides in equipping students with practical job skills as well as character and values enshrined in the Islamic religion. We inculcate both skills and good moral character and values in our students. This way, we help bring out all-rounded students who can easily fit in the society.

The University was incepted in 1997 to help increase access to education especially to marginalized groups. Initially, it used to offer Islamic-related courses only but has so far

opened its doors to other students who want to have a different experience in academics as they chart their career paths.

### **Emerging Muslim-oriented Products**

The establishment of Umma University is also at the backdrop of a growing Muslim population in the country. Muslims are part of the diverse Kenyan society that has uniquely lived in tolerance and respect for each other's religious beliefs from time immemorial. There are several key developmental sectors that have attempted to address the needs of the Muslim Community including the introduction of Sharia-Compliant products and services that are in line with Islamic principles. Such sectors include banking and insurance (Takaful insurance). According to the Islamic Law, banking should be interest-free, which is the principle applied in Islamic banking, with several banks opening up divisions offering these specialized products and services. These services are, however, open to non-Muslims also. It is for this reasons that Umma is open to offer quality training to all students, irrespective of their religion.



The emerging Muslim-oriented products and services in different sectors is a call to the University to continue producing the necessary and well-equipped workforce that will be well-versed in Islamic principles. Some of the courses offered include Bachelor of Business Management, Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies, Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Sharia, Bachelor of Science in Nursing (direct intake), and Bachelor of Science in Nursing (upgrading), Bachelor of Science in computer science, and Diploma in Islamic Banking and Finance. There are also courses offered at the Diploma and Certificate levels in Business Management, IT, Arabic Language and Islamic Studies.

Although this institution admits students from all corners of the country and the world over and not just Muslims, the foundation tenets will strongly be based on Islamic faith, which is also value-driven. Islamic faith can help redeem and transform the society from

erosion of values and moral decadence, since it is a religion of justice and rational behavior.

As Kenya revolutionizes its operations in tandem with the dynamic modern values, the future of many generations remains bleak if current value-systems are not changed. This is the more reason why studying at Umma University will help redeem the continuously waning value-system.

### **State-of-the-art Resources and Facilities**

The university is home to two campuses based in Thika and Kajiado as well as several learning centers in Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa respectively. In the two campuses, the facilities include spacious lecture halls, well-equipped computer laboratories, e-library, hostels, student clinics, mosques, and other recreational facilities.

The second phase of the development is an ultra-modern 10-storey building with essential facilities like lecture halls, lecture theatres, scientific and engineering laboratories, library, student lounges and administration offices. It will accommodate 6 faculties or schools. This phase of development also includes sports pavilion equipped with Olympic standard sporting facilities. It is to cost KSH. 1.35 Billion.

This is part of our expansion plans with which we want to ensure that we offer an environment that is conducive to the enhancement of accessible to education, which is a pillar expected to take Kenya to the next level.

### **Financial Aid Program**

The University also runs a student financial aid program that enables students from poor backgrounds to access education. It has thus come up with several scholarships to make it easy for students from low income families' to enroll and complete their studies at the institution and to also recognize best students in academic performance. These include non-need based and need-based academic scholarships.

The change that we want in order to propel this country to greater heights in future lies here at Umma. We offer a mix of high-level training, values and practical job market skills.

**WDN: The name 'Umma' is an Arabic word which connotes to mean 'Community'. Is your institution one that exclusively serves a certain community and could you also explain how Umma University is funded?**

**DVC:** While the name Umma means community, all the courses are secular and anybody who is interested and qualifies can enter Umma. The large portion of our budget is from Direct Aid-an International NGO. 30% of our budget is from within including tuition fees.

**WDN: Is Umma University an accredited university? If so, who provides the accreditation that allows it to operate as a legitimate educational institution and what curriculum do you use to operate your institution?**

**DVC:** Accreditation means public acceptance and confirmation evidenced by award of a Charter or Letter of Interim Authority, which a university meets and continues to meet the standards of academic excellence set by the Commission for University. Umma University has a Letter of Interim



Authority from the Commission for University Education and therefore in list of universities accredited to undertake university education in Kenya. All professional courses are cleared both by the Commission for University Education and Professional Councils. However, the process of getting a Charter is at an advanced stage.

**WDN: Currently, how many campuses and departments do you have and what are the major fields of student concentrations?**

**DVC:** Until we receive the charter, we do not have campuses yet but we have learning centers in Mombasa, Thika, Garissa, Nairobi Central Business District (CBD) as well as the Kajiado main Campus. In Thika we concentrate on Sharia and Islamic studies while in Kajiado all courses are availed to students.

**WDN: How many students attend the university and what is the male/female ratio?**

**DVC:** We have 713 students of whom females are 284 representing 39.83%. The ratio is 6:4.

There has been phenomenal growth in the student population from 2013 when the university was accredited to the present time. From an initial total of 69 students, the number increased to 713 in the current year. These were the pioneer degree students started with three programs approved by the Commission for University Education. The

degree students are now 373. The table below shows the growth of student population from 2013 to 2016:

<b>Programs</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Bachelor Degrees	<b>69</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>373</b>
Diploma	-	<b>114</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>230</b>
Certificate	-	<b>109</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>120</b>
Total	<b>68</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>713</b>

**WDN: African statistics indicate girls lag behind boys in education on a wider scale. Are there any specific programs catered to attract to educate girls and if so, what can you share with us on such programs?**

**DVC:** Our University does not discriminate against either boys or girls. At Umma, strict Islamic Principles are enforced. These include separate hostels and spiritual enhancement initiatives. Parents appreciate this and many female students are enrolled.

The university encourages the enrolment of female students and women employment as evident from the ratio of male to female students’ population in the university. The recent recruitment gave priority to the female gender in order to increase their ratio. This is because the university believes that empowering a woman is empowering the nation which is in line with the SDG goal of “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

We have also set up a student assistance fund mainly targeting female students who may not be able to continue at the university without financial assistance and would help them meet extra costs associated with being at the university.

**WDN: In the current growing pace of globalization and human interconnectedness, do you have academic agreements and student exchange programs with other educational institutions-nationally and internationally-a trend that is common with many advanced global colleges and universities?**

**DVC:** We have academic faculty development agreement with the International Institute of Islamic Thought based in the U.S.A and the International University of Africa, Sudan.

Umma University is at an advanced stage of entering partnership and collaboration with several universities including The University of Malaya, The International Islamic University of Malaysia, and The University of Science of Malaysia in some other significant areas. These areas include student and staff exchange, operational management, research and exchange of researchers, joint teaching and blending of Islamic courses with Business and Sciences.

We are also in the process of developing a partnership with Nagasaki University, Japan. The university aims to become an international pillar of cooperation and development; its linkages and partnerships will strengthen capacity in the region as well as enhance technology transfer.

Our donor is also supporting other Universities in Zanzibar and Somalia and soon starting another in Gabon. On the other hand, the Muslim Universities in East Africa have collaborated together in partnership to support their growth.

**WDN: What are the major challenges and opportunities you face and how do you tackle them or what measures do you plan to take to address them?**

**DVC:** While Muslims in Kenya have been waiting for long for a Muslim University, when Umma came into being, they did not develop full confidence that we could deliver their needs. So uptake has been somehow slow. We are doing aggressive marketing using Mosques to sensitize communities.

**WDN: What is your vision for expanding the university so it benefits the entire Umma? Do you plan to add more faculties and expand into other counties in Kenya and other neighboring countries? If so, what are the driving factors and what strategies do you have for such expansion?**

**DVC:** The sponsor has a vision of training and producing competent leaders and scholars of high integrity and moral uprightness to effect social transformation for sustainable development. The University has an approved Master Plan that contains phase 1, 2 and 3 infrastructural developments that will facilitate the realization of its vision. Phase 1 has been completed successfully while phase 2 has started with a large 10-floor building with additional classes, offices and laboratories. We hope to initiate new courses including studies on oil and gas when the construction is over.

**WDN: Not all faculties or departments have equal share of student intake. At Umma University, which faculty or department has the highest enrollment of students? If intake disparities exist, what are the major causes?**

**DVC:** The school of Sharia and Islamic Studies which offers sharia and Islamic studies courses has the highest enrollment of students. It has 365 students representing 51.2 % of the total student population in the university.

These courses aim at exposing students to rich, dynamic and inspiring spirit of Islamic heritage that helps in serving all humanity through infinite paths of dialogue and action. The programs also inspire thoughts based on plurality and openness of Islamic jurisprudence and civilization to enable students to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through research and consultation based on justice and truth.

The School of Business and Technology which comprise Business Studies and Computer and Information Technology is the second highly subscribed for intake with 348 students representing 48.8% of the total student population in the university. These courses involve higher fees than in the School of Sharia and Islamic Studies. These courses inspire innovation and critical thinking that can solve complex challenges facing new age business, thus giving students a distinctive advantage in the workplace. The graduates of these courses equally are in high demand among a wide range of employers.

However, the disparities are due to the fact that the university started with sharia and Islamic courses when it was first established in 1997. The courses were highly subsidized and graduates were sponsored for higher degree courses. The intake to these courses included students who graduated from the Islamic Madrassa system. The graduates are employed as high school and college tutors for Islamic studies, and judicial officers (Kadhis). These courses are therefore highly preferred.

**WDN: What are the jobs prospects for your students and does Umma University have a career support system or mechanism to help students search for jobs, nationally and internationally and how would you rate your job placement approaches?**

**DVC:** Our job placement approach is at a higher level as we cherish good character as a priority which adds value to potential employers' needs. However, we have student work programs where students are taken on part-time engagements within the university.

**WDN: Could you share with us if you have programs that engage with the university alumni or alumni relations to further support the institution and its brand name?**

**DVC:** We recognize that the alumni association of a university is its most loyal supporters and provides fundraising prospects. Umma University Alumni Association is being established and currently has elected interim officials. We are in regular contact

with the Association and most often invite them to our functions and special lecture programmes.

Once the legal registration certificate for our Alumni Association is obtained from the Attorney General, its members would serve as great role models for current students. The members shall be ambassadors who will take their knowledge of the University to their home counties and into their professional and social networks.

**WDN: Since the establishment of Umma University what are some of the lessons learned?**

**DVC:** To succeed in tough competition, you must have unique features that attract students.

**WDN: Thanks for sharing your views and ideas with our readers about your university.**

**DVC:** Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity.  
For more info visit [Umma Univesity website](http://Umma University website)

**WardheerNews:** [admin@wardheernews.com](mailto:admin@wardheernews.com)

---

Other related interviews:

[WDN Interview with the Founder Abaarso of school of science and technology](#)