

The Message International

Nov. - Dec. 2017

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National Campaign by ICNA Council for Social Justice

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN STOP SCHOOL BULLYING



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National Crisis

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do not report it

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of suicides in children
10-14 years old

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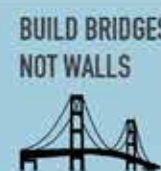
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The **Message International**
November - December 2017

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Postmaster sends address correction to: The Message International, P.O. Box 313174, Jamaica, NY 11432-3174.

URGENT APPEAL

Help Us Change the Narrative About Islam

Islamophobia is simply an extra-ordinary hate campaign that has spread ubiquitously throughout society and threatens all Americans because it breeds distrust and division. That is not just a self-deflecting perception. It is a very real phenomenon. The outcome today, sadly, is that anytime a Muslim commits a crime of violence anywhere in the world, Muslims everywhere, including America, are blamed as a collective: guilt by association.

We must recognize the simple ironic truth that

“the freedom of the press belongs to those who own it.”

Investment in building credible media outlets is imperative, providing sources of information that are dedicated to speaking truthfully to the people, about all things pertaining to America and its place in the world, and in particular presenting accurate reportage and coverage of Muslims, their religion, and issues important to them as a community integral to the American way of life.

We should always keep in mind that it is

“better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

We should engage ourselves in positive and proactive efforts, lighting millions of candles for truth, justice, and peace. To dispel the darkness, Islam advises us, through the Quran and our beloved Prophet (pbuh), to “repel evil with what is better.” May Allah (swt) help us all. Ameen.

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Protecting Our Children: Stop School Bullying

Editorial

Public school education in the United States was first mandated by the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1647. The intent of the judicial mandate was to teach Puritan values to children of the Colony and develop their literacy skills by primarily reading the Bible. In 1779, Thomas Jefferson, Founding Father and third president of the United States, proposed a two-track educational system for the young nation, one in which children of the land-owning aristocrats would learn the essential sciences while children of the landless poor would be instructed on fulfilling their place in society. Jefferson further proposed offering a few scholarships to gifted poor children, described by Jefferson as “raking a few geniuses from the rubbish.”

The Pennsylvania State Constitution mandated in 1790 that public education would be free, but only for the poor. It was envisioned that the affluent would be able to pay for their education by using their own resources. This 1790 state constitutional article seems to have presaged the de facto two-tier educational system that exists to this day in the United States. Wealthy school districts typically provide better facilities, ample and first-rate instructional materials, and accomplished, qualified teachers to their students. Urban and mostly impoverished districts generally lag in human and physical resources necessary to transmit the requisite knowledge and skills to compete in today’s high-tech environment.

A free, tax-based public-school system was established in Boston in 1817. Wealthy businessmen and artisans were the primary supporters of the tax-based system while wage earners opposed the additional tax liability. The first public high school in the United States opened in Boston in 1820 and, seven years later, the state of Massachusetts adopted a law providing a universal public-school system for all grades, free of charge. In contrast, from the 17th to the 19th century, draconian laws and practices restricted the education of children and adults in Southern states. Enslaved children and adults were forbidden by law to learn to read and write. Punishment for defiance of these laws was swift and severe — those caught defying this inviolable code were either flogged or killed. Instructors who were repeat offenders likely suffered the same fate as the slaves who were intent on learning.

The Jim Crow years of separate and unequal public accommodations, including schools and classrooms, militated against any potential for mutual racial and ethnic understanding, and calcified the polarization of the races. In the educational realm, Natives Americans fared no better than African Americans. From 1880 to 1920, over 100,000 Native American children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to boarding schools established under the auspices of the federal government. Native American boarding schools were ostensibly designed as part of a benevolent educational experiment to save Native Americans from

eventual extinction. But by stripping children of all vestiges of their tribal culture, language, names, and identity, government boarding schools hoped to “kill the Indian and save the man,” In the words of Richard H. Pratt, an army officer who founded such a school in 1879.

After over 250 years of legally-imposed segregation, children of various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic profiles were socially ill-equipped to harmoniously matriculate with students different from themselves, once schools were desegregated. School bullying was a natural consequence of America’s sordid history of White supremacy and racial discrimination. Bullying can be defined as the use of aggression, intimidation, or mistreatment to hurt, dominate, humiliate, or exclude others. Victims of school bullying seldom report their victimization to teachers, school administrators, or their parents. The fear of reprisals is reported to be the most common reason why children refuse to tell others that they have been bullied. Alarming, school bullying has been a major catalyst in the increased rate of suicide among 10 to 14-year old children. With the advent of social media, school bullies have the capacity to target their victims 24 hours a day. Cyberbully is a frightening phenomenon that prevents young people from finding sanctuary from bullies even in their own homes since cyberbullying is not restricted by location, time, or presence of any authority figure.

School bullying reflects the intimidation and harassment that occurs in the larger society. Every day, impressionable youth increasingly see acts of bullying, incivility, and bigotry being normalized and even trivialized. Among all public-school students in America today, Muslim children have the highest reported rate of being victimized by bullies. No child should be made to feel unsafe, vulnerable, and unprotected while in school. Child psychologists uniformly state that childhood trauma will likely have a deleterious effect on their mental and emotional makeup as adults. The Islamic Circle of North America, through its Civic Engagement Division, ICNA Council for Social Justice, has initiated a one-year National Campaign, “Protecting Our Children: Stop School Bullying.” The Campaign is designed to not only raise awareness about school bullying, but to also galvanize others to address this dangerous stalker — school bullying — in our midst. To find out how you can get involved or for additional information, contact Rameez Abid, (844) JUSTICE, or visit facebook.com/bullying.

Imam Khalid Fattah Griggs

We welcome your feedback.
Please write to us at
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ICNA Condemns Las Vegas Massacre



On Sunday, October 1, 64-year-old Stephen Paddock, a gambler and retired accountant, opened fire on a country music concert from his hotel room at the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. He killed 58 people and wounded more than 500. The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) issued a statement the following day, condemning the massacre in the strongest terms. "Our prayers and sympathies are with the victims of this cowardly attack," said Javaid Siddiqi, president of ICNA. The statement reads in part, "We are alarmed at the rise of cases of domestic terrorism and gun violence in our country. There should be no place in our society for indiscriminate violence

of this magnitude. There have been 276 mass shootings this year according to Gun Violence Archive, causing the deaths of many innocent men, women and children across the country." ICNA urges congress to pass "common sense" legislation on gun control.

Authorities think that Paddock may have been planning the attack for months. At least 23 weapons were found inside his hotel room, including multiple rifles, some with scopes and some with attached bump-fire stocks, devices that increase the firing speed of a semi-automatic rifle. Officers found Paddock dead on the floor from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Early Mass Killings in America

Following the Las Vegas mass shooting on October 1, many media sources called it the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. Some commentators refute that assertion, noting a number of mass killings that took place much earlier. For example, the Wilmington (North Carolina) massacre took place in 1898. White supremacists, outraged by the progressive direction that North Carolina politics was taking and the election of Africa-Americans to the state legislature, took over Wilmington and killed at least 60 African-Americans. Black leaders were jailed "for their own safety" and then evicted from the town, causing thousands of Black citizens to flee out of fear. Another mass killing took place in 1919 in Elaine, Arkansas. Black sharecroppers attended a meeting of the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America, seeking better treatment and pay from White plantation owners. Rumors swirled among the White population that a Black insurrection was planned. A mob of Whites, led by the county sheriff, descended upon the town and began killing Blacks. An estimated 200 died in the violence.

or abolish the Amendment that provides the right to "keep and bear arms."

Most Americans don't know, though, that the Second Amendment's statement, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed," was written and ratified to preserve the White militias in the southern states. These were slave patrols used to prevent slave uprisings. Dr. Carl T. Bogus, professor of law, has written about the Georgia statutes, for example, which "required patrols, under the direction of commissioned militia officers, to examine every plantation each month and authorized them to search 'all Negro Houses for offensive Weapons and Ammunition' and to apprehend and give twenty lashes to any slave found outside plantation grounds." The need for debate and action on gun control, and even the Second Amendment, is urgent. James Madison, the author of the militia clause, could never have imagined a future in which guns would become weapons of mass killing.

ICNA Relief Delivers Much Needed Aid to Puerto Rico



On September 20, Maria, a Category 4 hurricane, made landfall in Puerto Rico. Heavy storms and flooding devastated the small island of 3.4 million Americans. Two weeks after the hurricane hit, many were still without electricity and basic supplies, access to clean water was limited, and most of the cell towers were destroyed so that Puerto Ricans were unable to call relatives in the continental U.S. The scope of the destruction could cost up to \$95 billion, and help has been slow to come. Thus, ICNA Relief made its first-ever trip outside the U.S. mainland to bring aid to fellow citizens in Puerto Rico. ICNA Relief offices set up collection and distribution centers in New Jersey and Florida to collect relief items such food,

survival kits, blankets, etc.

On October 1, the ICNA Relief Disaster Relief Team, consisting of Imam Yusuf Rios and Muslim Chaplain Wilfredo Ruiz of Islamic Center of Puerto Rico Montehiedra, and Abdul Rauf Khan, Assistant Executive Director of ICNA Relief, headed to Puerto Rico to assess the situation. Bringing with them generators and MRE (meals ready to eat), they visited local communities, families, and Islamic centers that were affected. Upon their return, ICNA Relief planned to send a team of doctors to treat the many people who have not had access to medical care since the hurricane wreaked havoc on the island. For more information or to donate, please visit www.ICNARELIEF.org.

Festival-goers in MA Experience Sampling of Muslim Cultures



The second annual New England Muslim Festival was held on Sunday, September 17, in Malden, a town of roughly 60,000 just seven miles north of Boston. "Just come hang out with a Muslim," said Malika MacDonald, an organizer of the event and director of the Massachusetts field office of ICNA Relief. While visitors are invited to ask questions

about Islam, MacDonald notes, "...this is not a religious festival; it is a cultural festival." And so the aroma of grilled shawarma filled the air, henna tattoos were available, and festival-goers with curiosity could take home a Quran. One visitor, Naomi Brave, got a henna tattoo on her hand. "I think it's beautiful," she said. "It'll be interesting to go back to work on Monday with this." This was her second year attending the festival, and described her experience as a good way "to learn about my Muslim neighbors, get some good food, and hear some good music." Ayesha Kazmi, who was selling T-shirts and other clothing, said, "Everything is so much about countering hate, countering Islamophobia."

ICNA Dallas Distributes Flowers and Message

On Saturday August 21, the ICNA-Dallas team distributed flowers to their neighbors with the following message: "BRINGING SMILES TO OUR NEIGHBORS WITH ROSES. We, the Muslim Neighbors of this community, would like to thank its members for being Great Neighbors. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'The best companion in the sight of Almighty God is the one who is best to his neighbor.'"

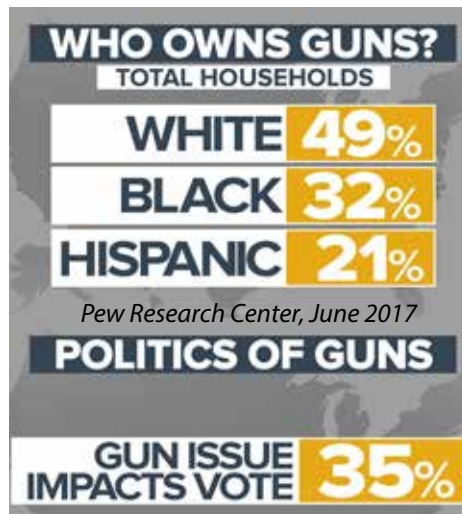
Many of the neighbors who received flowers were pleasantly surprised. One neighbor invited them in to have a drink of juice. Another neighbor invited them to a neighborhood get-together. The young people who accompanied their parents in the distribution had a good time, and were blessed to see an example of reaching out to neighbors with friendliness and good wishes.

ICNA Relief Health Clinic to Open in Philly



ICNA Relief will be opening a health clinic in the near future in the Holmesburg neighborhood of northeast Philadelphia. Basic health care services will be offered free to those who can't afford to pay. A city councilman, Bobby Henon, has received a number of calls from people in the area who don't want the clinic to open. "They don't reflect the neighborhood," Henon said of the callers. "They're just a very small — and I mean small — part of the community. We're not going to be intimidated by that." The clinic will be located in the 7400 block of Frankford Avenue.

Gun Deaths and Violence in America



According to the data in the FBI's Crime in the United States, 2015, the estimated number of murders in the U.S. in 2015 was 15,696; there was an estimated 327,374 robberies that year. The report states, "Firearms were used in 71.5 percent of the nation's murders, 40.8 percent of robberies, and 24.2 percent of aggravated

assaults." The Gun Violence Archive's (GVA) data on mass shootings (four or more people shot in one incident), shows that in the U.S., a mass shooting occurs, on average, every nine out of ten days. According to the GVA, the Las Vegas massacre was the 276th mass shooting, up to that date, in 2017. Yet, Congress year after year refuses to engage in an honest debate about legislating gun restrictions, even moderate, common sense ones like closing the gun-show loophole or restricting those who have been diagnosed with mental illness from purchasing a gun. Nearly all Americans, including gun owners, agree with these measures. The NRA, however, a powerful lobby, works tirelessly to obstruct any meaningful discussion or legislative restrictions. And fearmongering about the Second Amendment also impedes the passing of reasonable legislation. Gun enthusiasts keep repeating the fabrication that the government intends to take away guns

ICNA Relief Excels in Post-Hurricane Relief in Texas and Florida



ICNA Relief has been active, providing help to those affected by hurricanes hitting Houston, Texas and various cities in Florida. Abdulrauf Khan, a Pakistani immigrant and assistant executive director at ICNA Relief USA, seeks to assist those in need and also to model service to others for his three children. He says, "I have a son who is 18 years old." Khan remembers that his son asked him five years ago, "Dad, what have you done for this country?" Khan notes, "We have to work and we have to make sure our children feel that ownership of the country." He added, "We have to give back."

ICNA Relief's presence, whenever a disaster strikes, is noticed by non-Muslims. Some meet Muslims face-to-face for the first time when they need shelter or some other assistance. "It was their first experience coming to an Islamic Center," Khan said. "They felt like, 'this is what we feel like when we go to church, when we go to synagogue.'" Aqsa Cheema, administrative coordinator for ICNA Relief South Florida, states, "Charity is a big part of Islam, and giving back to the community is a big part of Islam." She adds, "You get the chance to distribute food and do things that can benefit the community."

Houston Area Masjids Offer Shelter After Hurricane Harvey

Hurricane Harvey wreaked disaster on Houston and surrounding areas the end of August and could end up costing upwards to \$190 billion for relief and rebuilding efforts. AccuWeather president Joel Myers said, "Parts of Houston, the United States' fourth largest city, will be uninhabitable for weeks and possibly months due to water damage, mold, disease-ridden water and all that will follow this 1,000-year flood." The catastrophic flooding forced thousands of people to seek shelter and Houston masjids opened their doors to those in need. "Mosques are open for everybody ... and we're treating everyone as VIP guests," said M.J. Khan, president of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston.

The Brand Lane Islamic Center in Staf-

ford, a Houston suburb, housed 80 to 90 people. The Islamic Society of Greater Houston teamed up with Baitulmaal, a Texas nonprofit relief organization, to provide evacuees with food, water and hygiene products. Mohammad Amin Moola, ISGH's vice president, whose own house was flooded so that he and his family had to be rescued by boat, remembered the 2001 storm that dropped 30 inches of rain on Houston. He said that cleaning supplies were hard to come by so the masjids will try to have those things available to people as cleanup begins. He voiced the sentiment of those who came together to help one another during a time of need: "This is what we are, as true Americans," he said. "When the time comes, we are one family."

Helping Hand Delivers Aid to Caribbean Islands



Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria devastated various islands in the Caribbean. More than 60 people died and thousands lost homes and personal belongings, and businesses were destroyed. Helping Hand USA launched a campaign to raise funds for families in need. The HHRD Emergency Relief Team visited affected areas to deliver emergency supplies including food, medicine, and water to the victims.

Georgia Masjids Opened Their Doors to People Fleeing Hurricane Irma

Following Hurricane Irma, many people fleeing the storm, including those traveling north from Florida, were sheltered at masjids across the state of Georgia. Al-Farooq Masjid in Atlanta hosted 170 people, 25 people were welcomed at Clarkston's Masjid Al-Momineen, 25 at the Islamic Center of Warner Robins, 20 at Fayetteville's Islamic Community Center, 17 people at Hamzah Islamic Center, and smaller groups of families at various other mosques.

Fifteen area mosques opened their doors as shelters and five others operated as collection and distribution points for food and other survival necessities.

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Turkey Asks Bangladesh to Open Its Border to Rohingya Muslims



The latest violence in the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar broke out the end of August. Myanmar security forces, in a scorched-earth campaign to drive out the Muslims, are burning down entire villages. Tirana Hassan, Amnesty International's Crisis Response Director, describes the current situation as an "ethnic cleansing." Refugees are flooding toward the border of neighboring country Bangladesh which responded by sealing off its border. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has called on Bangladesh to open its border and that Turkey would cover

all the expenses associated with offering refuge to those fleeing the violence. "We have also mobilized the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We will hold a summit regarding the Rakhine state this year. We need to find a decisive and permanent solution to this problem," Çavuşoğlu added. The UN has documented many crimes against humanity during the ongoing persecution, including killing, mass gang-rapes, and beatings. Before the new round of violence, roughly 400,000 Rohingya refugees were in Bangladesh. To help Rohingya Muslims, please visit www.HHRD.org.

USCMO Campaigns to End Rohingya Persecution and Ethnic Cleansing



The US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) is pursuing various avenues in the campaign to end the persecution and ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. In September, a USCMO delegation met with the ambassadors of Myanmar, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Turkey.

"We held constructive meetings with each of the ambassadors, who obviously

represent entities with very different positions and commitments regarding the Rohingya" says Oussama Jammal, USCMO Secretary General. "We focused on common ground to establish channels for American Muslims to help the Rohingya survive the catastrophe they face now and to undo the insupportable conditions that have allowed it for their future."

Helping Hand Providing Relief to Rohingya Muslims

HHRD's Emergency Response Team (ERT) is on location in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh. The makeshift camps lack basic hygiene conditions, and infections and disease are on the rise. The HHRD team reports that 154,000 children are malnourished. The following relief items are examples of what is needed:

- Food package: this package will help feed a family of six for one month — \$100 per package.
- Shelter: this will provide tarpaulins and construction materials for housing — \$200 per family.
- Well-water hand pumps: Each pump provides a clean water source — \$450 per pump.

In addition, through donations, HHRD will provide medical clinics for the refugee families. This is crucial as lack of nutrition and safe drinking water has made the Rohingya families prone to illnesses and water borne diseases. To help these desperate families, please go to www.hhrd.org to donate.

ICNA CSJ Leads Protest at Myanmar Embassy in DC

On September 8, ICNA Council for Social Justice (CSJ), in partnership with Dar al-Hijrah, CAIR, American Muslims for Palestine, Dar al-Noor, ICNA VA Mosque, Muslim Ummah of North America, and the Muslim American Society-DC, led a protest in front of the Myanmar Embassy in Washington to demand a stop to the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims from the country formerly known as Burma.

The Rohingya number roughly one million in Myanmar with up to another million living as refugees in various countries. The UN, in 2013, called the Rohingya one of the most persecuted people in the world. The protest began with a khutba given by Br. Naeem Baig of ICNA and the Iqamah prayer. While the military wields the real power in Myanmar, many have criticized Aung Su Ki, officially titled State Counsellor, for not doing more to stop the atrocities against the Rohingya.

Trump Administration Sued Over DACA



On September 18, six undocumented immigrants filed suit in a San Francisco federal court against the Trump administration's decision to end DACA—the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. There are roughly 800,000 undocumented young immigrants who, under the Obama-era DACA program, were legally permitted to live and work in the U.S. President Trump has since urged Congress to address the issue before the program's protections end after a six-month grace period. The lawsuit contends that the administration should not have unilaterally ended the program. Some legal experts, however, counter that

a president has wide scope of authority in determining and implementing immigration policy.

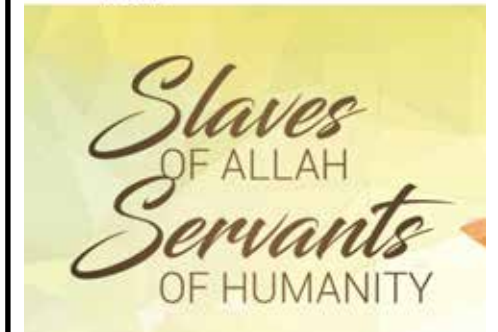
In a Facebook post, Obama wrote, "Whatever concerns or complaints Americans may have about immigration in general, we shouldn't threaten the future of this group of young people who are here through no fault of their own, who pose no threat, who are not taking away anything from the rest of us." Many in the business community, Democrats and a number of Republicans, and immigration activists have characterized the decision to end DACA as unfair and counterproductive.

Rutgers Business School Team Wins \$1 million Hult Prize



In 2009, Ahmad Ashkar was an MBA student at Hult International Business School. He wanted to facilitate opportunities for young people to come up with entrepreneurial ideas to help solve social challenges around the world. With backing from the school, he took action and established a student competition for creative entrepreneurial ideas to increase social good. This year a team from Rutgers Business School won the \$1 million Hult Prize, awarded on September 16, for their idea of how to improve the lives of refugees overseas with a rickshaw transportation business. The team was comprised of

ICNA-MAS Annual South-Central Conv. Announced for Thanksgiving



The 11th Annual ICNA-MAS South-Central Convention 2017 will be held on Thanksgiving weekend, November 24 through November 26, in Houston, Texas. Omar Suleiman and Yasir Qadhi will be joined by other eminent speakers to inspire and enlighten attendees. There will be interactive presentations, a sisters-only program, youth lectures, a matrimonial service, midnight brothers' basketball tournament, a bazaar, and much more. Muslim Children of North America (MCNA) will provide learning and fun for children 3 to 10 years old. They will learn about Muslim heroes and role models, and will enjoy face painting and movies with popcorn.

The venue is the Hilton Americas-Houston at 1600 Lamar Street in Houston. Registration for the ICNA-MAS Convention includes unlimited access to all main sessions, the Bazaar area, Parallel Sessions, Sisters Sessions, and Window to Islam sessions. For more information, visit <http://icnatexas.org/>.

student Gia Farooqi, Hasan Usmani and Moneeb Mian, both newly graduated, and alumna Hanaa Lakhani. Hasan Usmani attended and graduated from Noorul Iman Islamic School in South Brunswick, New Jersey. The proposed startup, Roshni Rides, would employ existing rickshaw drivers, use pre-loaded transaction cards, and encourage ride-sharing.

The team was up against stiff competition from five finalist schools including Harvard University's Kennedy School, the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, the University of Waterloo, the University of Calgary, and York University. Bill Clinton announced the winning team after all the pitches were made to the Hult judges.

Exhibition Opens in Brussels: 'Islam, it's also our History!'

Geert Vanden Wijngaert, AP



The exhibition, "Islam, it's also our History!", opened on September 15 and runs to January 2018 at the Vanderborgh building in Brussels. The road to bringing this exhibition to the public was difficult following the terror attacks in that city in 2016. First, the timing was controversial, and then there were difficulties finding a location that was willing to host the show. All obstacles, however, were finally overcome and the exhibition, funded by the European Union and Belgian authorities, is finally open to the public. "We want to make clear to Europeans that Islam is part of European civilization and that it isn't a

recent import but has roots going back 13 centuries," said Isabelle Benoit, a historian with Tempora, the organization that designed the exhibition. Tempora states that the exhibit has one key message, that "Muslim settlement in Europe is as old as Islam itself and goes through cycles of expansion and retraction. The exhibition highlights the shared spiritual and intellectual origins of Muslim and European civilisations (i.e. their Abrahamic heritage) and demonstrates that while relations between them have been conflicted over the centuries, the two civilisations have influenced and enriched one another."

Singapore's New President: Female and Muslim



Singapore, the sovereign city-state in Southeast Asia just off the coast of southern Malaysia, has inaugurated its first female president. Halimah Yacob, of the Malay Muslim minority, takes office despite criticism that authorities eliminated her rivals by declaring that they did not meet eligibility requirements. Yacob, 63, said in her first speech that she would represent all Singaporeans "regardless of race, language, or religion." She added, "I look forward to the day when we will no longer need to... have reserved elections, and Singaporeans naturally and regularly elect citizens of all races as presidents." She is a former speaker of the parliament and served in that chamber for almost 20 years.

Halal Option in Restaurant Delivery in China Provoked Backlash



Meituan Takeaway, one of China's largest food delivery services, launched an option for halal food in July. China is home to 23 million Muslims, only 2 percent of the 1.38 billion population, with the Han ethnic group comprising 92 percent. The halal option sparked outrage among the Han and after some called for a boycott of the company, Meituan cancelled the service. China is officially atheist and there is a rising tide of anti-Muslim sentiment in the country.

Some view the growing halal food

industry in China as divisive to Chinese society. "This will strengthen the identity of Muslim people and make the gap between Muslims (and) non-Muslims ever larger," wrote Xi Wuyi, a professor of Marxism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. James Leibold, a professor of Chinese politics at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, notes, however, that "Concerns about halal food have become an outlet for irrational fears and concerns about Muslims and the perceived growing influence of Islam in China."

ICNA Relief Tour with Jeremy McLellan



ICNA Relief launched a comedy tour on September 22, featuring Jeremy McLellan, a standup comedian from Charleston, South Carolina. He won the 2015 and 2016 Charleston Standup Comedy Competition and was named Best Local Comic by the Charleston City Paper. The events also featured Faizan Mumtaz from Chicago. Shows were held in cities across the country. Those venues included Miami, Orlando, Seattle, St. Louis, Detroit, and Phoenix. All funds raised support ICNA Relief's refugee resettlement projects.

Protests in St. Louis After Acquittal of Officer Who Fatally Shot a Man



On September 15, St. Louis police officer Jason Stockley was acquitted for the shooting death of Anthony Lamar Smith. In 2011, Stockley and his partner gave chase when Smith drove away from the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant where, it was suspected, he was dealing drugs. Stockley was heard on the dashcam video saying that he would kill Smith. The prosecutor, who charged Stockley with first-degree murder, alleged that he also planted a gun in Smith's car. After they rammed Smith's car, Stockley went up to Smith's car and fired five shots, killing the man. Stockley had requested a bench trial (trial before a judge rather

than a jury), and Judge Timothy Wilson, who heard the case, wrote in his verdict, "This Court, as the trier of fact, is simply not firmly convinced of defendant's guilt."

Stockley asserts that he fired five shots only after Smith refused to put up his hands and, according to the officer, reached for a gun. Stockley says he found the gun between the center console and the passenger seat. Prosecutors countered that Stockley went into a bag in the police SUV before he allegedly found the gun.

Protestors are outraged that the gun found in Smith's car had only Stockley's DNA on it, not Smith's.

Iraqi-American Wrongly Handcuffed and Arrested at Wichita bank

Sattar Ali's family sold their home in Dearborn, Michigan and had recently moved back to Wichita, Kansas so that Ali could pursue a doctorate in mechanical engineering at Wichita State University. His 18-year-old son is also a student there. Sattar Ali emigrated to the U.S. from Iraq in 1993. When Ali went to deposit the check from the sale of the family home, the teller called 9-1-1, saying that she thought the check was fake. When police arrived at the bank, they handcuffed and arrested Ali, and also arrested his wife and 15-year-old daughter who had been waiting in the car. Ali says, "I was talking

to them for less than five minutes and I found the police behind me, handcuffed me, confiscated everything and took me outside." He added, "They didn't say why or what happened or what did we do." He had presented the documents to verify the check as valid but says that the police did not make any effort to verify it until after they had arrested him and his family. He thinks that this was a case of racial profiling. "They jumped to conclusions," he said. The check was "presented by someone named Sattar Ali, not James or Robert." Once the police verified the check, the family was released.

New Poll on Issues of Race

An online poll, the Ipsos Poll, conducted by Thomson Reuters and the University of Virginia Center for Politics, reveals interesting results about Americans' views of race. The poll asked 5,360 participants questions about race to which they could agree or disagree — strongly or somewhat — or indicate they felt neutral or didn't know. Asked if all races are equal, 70 percent strongly agreed and another 12 percent somewhat agreed. As to whether all races should be treated equally, 80 percent strongly agreed and 9 percent somewhat. A net 31 percent agreed that "America must protect and preserve its White European heritage," yet only 8 percent indicated that they support white nationalism as a "group or movement." A net 59 percent agreed that "Political correctness' threatens our liberty as Americans to speak our minds." Kyle Kondik, communications director at the University of Virginia Center for Politics, noted, "The poll results do show both an American public that overwhelmingly rejects racist affiliations and movements but at the same time is more tolerant of racially insensitive positions."

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White Supremacist Flyers Posted Around Univ. of Houston

Emboldened White supremacist groups are active this year trying to recruit new members. This is not new. Last year, Vanguard America, one such group, hung flyers on college campuses in Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. This September, the University of Houston had flyers posted across the campus with varying messages such as “Beware the International Jew,” “Imagine a Muslim-Free America” and “We Have the Right to Exist.” The university’s chief of police Ceaser Moore Jr. said, “We are working to address the inappropriate and possible criminal postings around campus.” While all the flyers were taken down, the university itself removed only those that were posted in areas prohibited by the university. Mike Rosen, executive director of media relations at UH, noted, “We respect the constitutional right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression, regardless of how reprehensible the content may be.”

Teens Share Their Experience of Coping with Islamophobia

In a piece on HuffPost, “Two Muslim Teens On Navigating Girlhood And Islamophobia In Their America,” Carol Kuruvilla, writes about her conversation with two Muslim teen girls about their lives in the U.S. and how they cope with Islamophobia. The interviews are part of HuffPost’s “Listen to America” tour. Salsabel Fares lives in Missouri and Arshia Hussain in Minnesota, both 17 years old. They were asked many questions including what their feelings were when they heard about the June murder of 17-year-old Nabra Hassanen, abducted while walking near the masjid she attended in Virginia. Fares was stunned when she heard about the murder from her friends and family. “I was so incredibly upset,” she said. “It just scared me reading it. Because of my religion, I fear for my safety and I fear for my life.” Hussain responded in a similar way. “That could have happened to any of us, to any Muslim girl,” she said. “There are so many Muslim girls thinking that it could have happened to them.”



The Message Forum

when reading about it is not enough...

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MAHMOUD ABDUL-RAUF
Former NBA star, Blackballed for taking a principled stand regarding the National Anthem



ZAREENA GREWAL
Documentary film-maker on Mr. Abdul-Rauf’s story

Welcoming remarks given by:



ILYASAH SHABAZZ
The 3rd daughter of Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz. She’s an educator, activist, and an award-winning author.



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The Message Forum: When Reading About It Is Not Enough

The Message Forum is a project of The Message International Magazine and ICNA Council for Social Justice. It is designed to bring together diverse voices from the community to discuss social justice and human rights issues with an eye towards motivating participants to take individual and collective actions.

The Message Forum was first inaugurated in 1996 in the Bosnia Center in Manhattan, New York. For approximately 18 months, The Message Forum sponsored interesting, thought-provoking programs, monthly and bi-monthly, that developed a loyal audience of activists, critical thinkers, and men and women of various religious and political persuasions. Even among other well-received programs, the most lauded of The Message Forum series was the appearance of Dr. Betty Shabazz, the widow of El Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X), in September 1996. Other particularly well-received programs during The Forum’s first iteration were “The Red Roots of Islam,” a discussion about the historical and contemporary relationship between Islam and Native Americans in the United States, “Islam and the African American Community,” and “Muslims and the American Electoral Process.”

The Message Forum intends to work in tandem with The Message International Magazine and ICNA Council for Social Justice in highlighting issues of topical concern that warrant further community discussion beyond the pages of the magazine, as represented in The Forum’s subtitle, “When Reading About It Is Not Enough.” In an age when blatant lies are presented as “alternative facts,” the necessity for critical analysis and public discussion beyond mainstream media sources is imperative. The Message Forum seeks to delve into issues with the aim of understanding root causes and practical, achievable actions that individuals and groups can take to facilitate incremental and/or significant positive changes in our communities.

The first present-day event scheduled by The Message Forum will be held October 26 in one of the most historic landmarks in the country, The Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center located in Harlem. The building houses the Audubon Ballroom where El Hajj Malik Shabazz was martyred, on

February 21, 1965. The 10/26 program will be a Conversation Among Mahmoud Abdul Rauf, Zareena Grewal, and Ilyasah Shabazz.

Mahmoud Abdul Rauf is one of the most prolific free throw and long-range shooters in the history of college and NBA basketball. As a member of the NBA’s Denver Nuggets, Mahmoud decided for the 1995-96 season that he would not stand for the National Anthem or salute the flag. When asked why by a reporter, he stated, “The flag is a symbol of oppression... and the United States has a long history of tyranny.” The NBA gave him a one-game suspension and fined him \$31,000. After two days, a compromise was reached where he agreed to stand during the anthem and look downward, with his eyes closed. He silently recited an Islamic prayer for the oppressed in the world. At the end of the season, the Nuggets traded him to the Sacramento Kings, and one year later he signed as a free agent with the Vancouver Grizzlies. Mahmoud bounced around to a few other teams in various countries, as no NBA team wanted to touch him after his anthem protest, even though he was near the peak of his career. Years later, in an interview, Mahmoud said, “It’s priceless to know that I can go to sleep knowing that I stood to my principles.” He continued, “Whether I go broke, whether they take my life, whatever it is, I stood on principles. To me, that is worth more than wealth and fame.”

Zareena Grewal teaches historical anthropology at Yale University and produced the highly acclaimed documentary about Mahmoud, “By the Dawn’s Early Light: Chris Jackson’s Journey to Islam.” She will be in conversation with Mahmoud and Ilyasah Shabazz, the third daughter of Malcolm X. Ilyasah is an author, activist, motivational speaker, and lecturer. The Conversations will be held at the Shabazz Center, 3940 Broadway, New York, NY 10032, Thursday, October 26, 2017, at 6:30 PM.

The Message Forum plans to present thought-provoking, incisive information using various formats including panel discussions, videos, lectures, the Spoken Word (poetry, monologue, rap, etc.), and socially-conscious artistic presentations. Please share with us your suggestions about future Forum-sponsored events. You can reach us at facebook.com/MessageForum.

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ICNA Sisters' First Ever American Muslim Women's Conference Held in Virginia

By Javeria Salman

Women from across the nation attended ICNA Sisters' first ever American Muslim Women's Conference Saturday in Chantilly, Virginia to talk about "Changing the Narrative" of Muslim women in the United States.

The approximately 400 invited guests included female leaders not only from within ICNA's own divisions, but also from several other prominent U.S. organizations, distinguished professors, civil rights organizers, doctors and Islamic scholars.

During the welcome address, ICNA Sisters president Sadia Salman said, "The women here represent the diverse Muslim women that make up our society. Which is why with the current situation of our nation, the world and our Ummah, it is more important than ever before for us to stand united as one." She added that despite the various organizations and platforms the women at the conference were a part of, it was their "duty to stand up and work together" against the challenges in society.

The conference aimed to unite women leaders from across the nation to hear about, discuss and

highlight possible solutions to several pressing issues facing the American Muslim woman, according to Faizah Aslam, secretary general of ICNA Sisters.

The morning portion of the event began with speakers, Dr. Zainab Alwani, Aisha al-Adawiya, Farhana Matin and Shaikha Anse Tamara Gray discussing topics ranging from how the Muslim woman is defined in today's society, the journey of American Muslim women in the U.S., to how American Muslim women are not only the backbone of the household but are also the rising leaders in society and finally, how American Muslim women can unveil the power they have and use it to contribute to a successful society.

Following lunch, the audience had the chance to attend two parallel panel sessions, "Oppression: What, Where, & When" with Alwani, Salma Abugideiri, Nahela Morales and Zahra Billoo and "Through the Filters: Myth vs Reality" with Alia Salem, Hena Zuberi, Marya Bangee and Rowaida AbdelAziz. The first highlighted and answered questions of how Muslim women are oppressed in the U.S.

and what are the different forms of oppression, while the other handled questions of the portrayal of Muslim women in media and what can be done to change the perception of women in film and news media.

The last main hall session which focused on areas where American Muslim women are already contributing and building a counter narrative to the one seen most frequently in media. The conference ended which opinions and feedback collected during the sessions which were read was a way to share with the audience what are possible initiatives and solutions to some of the issues discussed during the event, Aslam said.

"It was more successful than I anticipated," Abeer Sher, ICNA Sisters vice-president said. "The reason being I didn't expect to gather that many Muslim women leadership from across the United States under one roof, but Alhamdulillah it happened. My heart is so warm from hearing during the sessions just how ready the Muslim women were to unite on every level."

Javeria Salman is an active member of Young Muslims and ICNA Sisters Wing.



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What say you?

By Musab Abdali

If you are a Muslim youth in America, it's critical that you not only understand the fundamentals of Islam and its history, but also the history of minority communities in America. We must educate ourselves about the extermination of Native Americans, the chattel slavery and ongoing structural racism against African Americans, the exploitation of Chinese laborers, and the animosity toward Japanese immigrants, Jews, Irish Catholic refugees, and Latinos. We should also study the Red Scare and the McCarthyite persecution of Communists and those accused of being Communists, the Women's Suffrage Movement and those who tried to impede it, and the contemporary issue, often a controversial topic in our communities, concerning the discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community. Even when we have differences with the beliefs or values of any particular oppressed minority, it is critical that we familiarize ourselves with how the dominant culture has repeatedly and systematically exploited, disenfranchised, and/or sought to decimate the social infrastructure and culture of minority communities. One infamous example is the CIA's involvement in transporting and distributing crack cocaine in the African American community during the Reagan administration.

Once dismissed as conspiracy theory, this chapter in CIA history has been researched and well-documented by various investigative journalists including Gary Webb, author of "Dark Alliances." We must recognize the vital and unyielding commitment of Islam to justice, and to the rights and well-being of all people. This is one of the primary ways we will be able to recognize and withstand attacks against our own community, secure our future in this nation, and hold on to our values and beliefs.

There are existing Islamic institutions in the United States that fail to differentiate between Islamic culture and the various traditions of Muslim-majority nations. Consequently, Muslim Americans, particularly Muslim youth, are often confused by teachings that unnecessarily disenfranchise and alienate them from aspects of American society that are not contradictory with Islamic beliefs. Rather than insisting that the Islamic worldview as delineated and taught in our traditional centers of learning is irreproachable and infallible, we must contribute to an environment that encourages critical thinking and a willingness to learn about the history and social nuances of the society in which we live. Young adult Muslim Americans should initiate an intensive study of American history, beyond that which is taught in our public schools. Our leaders and teachers must be individuals who are knowledgeable about the history of the 241-year-old social, political, and economic experiment known as the United States of America, with all its good points and its weaknesses, and its too frequent ignoble conduct toward many, both citizens and immigrants. Additionally, young Muslim Americans need to study classical Islamic works, as well as the literature of the revivalist theorists and movements of the last 150 years, from around the time of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire up to the present era. There was a time in our history when great Muslim scholars, thinkers, and visionaries guided the Ummah, even though the Muslim nations were physically and mentally colonized and in disarray. These leaders had firm understanding of Quran and sunnah as well as deep grasp of, and insight into, the social and geo-political conditions that prevailed.

Let's try stepping away for a moment from our non-productive social media "Statuses," "Likes," and the "clicktivism" that we are so passionately immersed in. Much of it is petty, distracting, or divisive. Muslim youth — let's spend more time learning, thinking, and developing our character. That is a much more productive outlet for our youthful passion and energy. Acquiring sound knowledge and the purifying of our souls can unite us, giving us a common ground for speaking truth and taking action. What Say You?

Musab Abdali is a community activist, thought leader, and former Young Muslims national and local leader. He will regularly submit articles to The Message Magazine under the heading What Say You?



**This is the
opening salvo
calling for young
Muslim Americans
to initiate an
intensive study of
American history
that is not taught
in school. We must
also learn the
nuances of this
country's social
and cultural history**



Hadith and its Commentary on **ESSENTIAL MANNERS THROUGH SPEECH AND COURTESY**

*A Slightly Modified Excerpt from Commentary on the Forty Hadith of Imam Al-Nawawi,
Timeless Prophetic Gems of Guidance and Wisdom by Dr. Jamal Ahmed Badi*

Abū Hurairah (R) narrated that the Messenger of Allah said,
"Let one who believes in Allah and the Last Day speak good
or be silent. And let one who believes in Allah and the Last Day
honor his neighbor. And let one who believes in Allah and
in the Last Day honor his guest" (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim).

Introduction

This hadīth contains the rulings concerning the tongue and the behavior of Muslims towards others. It also emphasizes that we are responsible for whatever that we say. Al-Imām Haythamī points out that this hadīth is very similar in meaning to Hadith 13 which says: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." He says that everyone is a neighbor to someone else. Therefore, if this hadīth is properly practiced and applied, there will be a stronger bond and love within society. However, one additional thing is that in this hadith, neighbor can mean anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim. So, in this hadith, good mannerisms are extended to a broader group of people including fellow non-Muslims who reside nearby.

Lessons

GUARDING OUR SPEECH

The responsibility of the Muslim upon what he/she says is mentioned in the Quran in Surahs Quaff, āyah 18: "Not a word does he utter but there is a watcher by him ready to record it." Furthermore, there are many hadiths which highlight the importance of our speech and utterances. The Prophet (pbuh) says: "A man utters a word pleasing to Allah without considering it of any significance for which Allah exalts his rank (in Jannah); another one speaks a word displeasing to Allah without considering it of any importance, and for this reason he will sink down into Hell" (Al-Buhari).

This shows that the words spoken can have a direct effect on us, whether we perceive it or not. The Prophet (pbuh) also narrates a story about one righteous person who fell into the Hellfire on account of just one statement: "There were two men among Banū Isrāīl, who were striving for the same goal. One of them would commit sin and the other would strive to do his best in the world. The man who exerted himself in worship continued to see the other in sin. He would say: 'Refrain from it.' One day he found him in sin and said to him: 'Refrain from it.' He said: 'Leave me alone with my Lord. Have you been sent as a watchman over me?' He said: 'I swear by Allah, Allah will not forgive you, nor will he admit you to Paradise.' Then their souls

were taken back [by Allah], and they met together with the Lord of the worlds. He (SWT) said to this man who had striven hard in worship: 'Had you knowledge about Me or had you power over that which I had in My hand?' He said to the man who sinned: 'Go and enter Paradise by My mercy.' He said about the other: 'Take him to Hell.'" Abū Hurairah said: "By Him in Whose hand my soul is, he spoke a word by which this world and the next world of his were destroyed" (Sunan Abu Dawud).

TYPES OF GOOD SPEECH

There are many ways in which we can say good things. The best of these are the following: dhikrullah (remembrance of Allah), recitation of the Qur'an, du'a, and nasīhah. These are all things that are pleasing to Allah. Furthermore, there are many sunan and ibadat which assist us in saying that which is good and restrain us from uttering evil. Whenever we speak to another person, regardless of whether they are strangers, friends, relatives, or neighbors, we should use the best words and terms.

Even when we do not intend to say something inherently bad, we should be careful with our tongues. Talk which has little or no benefit should be avoided. We need to realize that others may interpret our speech as negative from our body language, misinterpretation, or their viewpoint. Additionally, we should speak in a manner that is simple and easy to comprehend. Failing to choose the appropriate words and/or mannerisms may lead to a misinterpretation and end up with a conflict. On the other hand, as a listener, we have to interpret what is said in a positive and good way. We should not over-interpret what we hear or read between the lines. By paying attention to this, we minimize disputes and conflicts from our end. Furthermore, this helps in elevating our character by avoiding suspicion, bias, and negativity.

If we are being consulted by someone and sought after for advice, we should try our best to give good advice. The advice given should assist and not exacerbate the problem or situation. If we do not have a sufficient amount of knowledge or are unable to provide the proper advice, then it is preferable that we exercise silence. We should also try to practice mu'āsah, to say good things of

encouragement to those who are in low spirits. Whenever we meet people who are sick, sad, depressed or in a bad frame of mind, we should always say things that can make them feel better. Specifically, reminding them to have patience in facing their calamity and encouraging them to be positive and strong.

If we find ourselves in the middle of a dispute between two people, such as between relatives or friends, we should not take sides. We should always try to assist them in reconciling their differences and in ending the dispute. In these types of circumstances or when giving nasīhah, we should ensure that confidentiality is maintained to minimize other problems from occurring.

KEEPING SILENT: RESTRAINING THE TONGUE

It is essential that we restrain the tongue from the major evils before focusing on the smaller evils and ills. We, at all costs, have to refrain ourselves from saying that which is bad or untrue (i.e., a lie). Similarly, we must always verify any news that comes to us before disseminating it or adopting as true. This would prevent us from spreading lies and rumors. Additionally, it is essential for us to refrain from the major sins of the tongue such as slandering and backbiting. It is also a sin to make fun of others. Sarcasm and making fun of others is also to be avoided as it is a common social ill of today.

The act of complaining on simple matters may lead us to the act of impatience. This may affect our attitude and our actions. Should we wish to lament, we should direct it towards Allah alone. Such an act is known as munājah, which is a form of ibādah. Complaining to others besides Allah (SWT) is known as tashakkī which cancels out the ibādah from munājah and sabr with respect to this hadith. In restraining the tongue, sabr can also be defined as (1) to refrain oneself from panicking or being out of control, and (2) refraining one's tongue from complaining. Thus, we should learn to minimize and ultimately eliminate the act of complaining.

Non-beneficial talk should be avoided to the best of our capacity. People can talk and chat for hours but a lot of what is said often has no value and is devoid of benefit, both for the talker and listener.

In fact, such conversations can lead us into an area where we can say something displeasing to Allah (SWT). Furthermore, in Hadith 29, the Prophet (pbuh) gave Musādh (R) a very important piece of advice in his question about the thing that will take him to Paradise and keep him away from Hell-fire: "...And shall I not tell you of the controlling of all that?" I said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah." So, he took hold of his tongue and said: "Restrain this." I said: "O Prophet of Allah, will we be held accountable for what we say?" He said: "May your mother be bereft of you! Is there anything that topples people on their faces [or he said, on their noses] into the Hell-fire other than the jests of their tongues?"

At times we may encounter a situation that involves a fitnah or trial. In these sensitive circumstances, we have to be more careful of what we say. People can easily panic, get hopeless, and believe things which are not true. Some people may take advantage of the situation and say things which can worsen it. That is why we must be careful of what we say as it may increase the public's fear and anxiety. Rather, we should use words that are positive and hopeful, to uplift the spirit of those facing the tribulation or problem.

COURTESY TO THE NEIGHBOR

The second part of this hadith stresses courtesy and generosity to our neighbors and guests. This is mentioned in Sūrah Nisā, āyah 36: "...do good to parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer [you meet], and those [slaves] whom your right hand possesses." In a hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) said: "Jibril (AS) kept advising me concerning the neighbor to the point that I thought that he would inherit from his neighbor" (Sahih al-Bukhari; also narrated in Muslim).

Another hadith records the Prophet (pbuh) emphatically stating that one does not have complete imān if his neighbor is not safe from his affairs. He (pbuh) said: "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was said, "Who is that, O Allah's Messenger?" He (pbuh) said, "That person whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil"

In this hadith, neighbor can mean anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim. So, good mannerisms are extended to a broader group of people including fellow non-Muslims

(Sahih al-Bukhari). In another hadith, the Messenger of Allah states: "When you make some soup, make a good amount by adding plenty of liquid, and give some to your neighbors" (Sahih Muslim). This sharing of food between neighbors strengthens the relationship between them. We should be nice to our neighbors and share our food with them, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. We should be patient with our neighbor even if he annoys us. In another hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) mentioned one of three types of people beloved to Allah (SWT): "A man who has a bad neighbor who annoys and disturbs him, but he bears it with patience and forbearance until Allah ends the matter either during his lifetime or upon the death of either of them" (Musnad Ahmad, sahih as per Al-Sheikh al-Albānī). This shows the importance of keeping good relations with neighbors even if they are a source of annoyance or harm.

COURTESY TO THE GUEST

The guest mentioned in the last part of the hadith is generally interpreted as "a travelling visitor who has come to stay for a short while." In another hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) says: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his guest. His special gift [to the guest] is one day and night. He [the guest] is to be entertained for three days. Whatever is beyond that is an act of sadaqah. It is not lawful for a guest to stay with his host to the extent that he makes things difficult for him [the host]" (Sahih al-Bukhārī).

Regarding this ruling extrapolated from this hadith, the majority of scholars are of the opinion that hosting is not wājib. Even though it is a great and noble act, it is considered mustahabb or a recommended act. According to many scholars, the recommended act of host-

ing does not extend to evildoers or heretics. This is because there is potential for harm for the host and his household. However, some contemporary scholars are of the view that we should host even those who are sinners. This is due to the likelihood that by hosting them and being good to them, we might influence them to change and become better people. Hosting sinners would be following a general principle of fiqh that allows us to tolerate a minor harm in order to attain a major benefit (e.g. dawah, nasīhah). Nonetheless, we should be very cautious when hosting such people; we should only do so if we know that no harm may be inflicted upon us or our household.

Conclusion

This hadith teaches us the proper manners with regards to speech and the honoring of our neighbors and guests. Speech is a common cause of discord and division within society and at the individual level. Again, the Prophet (pbuh) summarizes a great and important principle with a few words. The second part of the hadith emphasizes the best of mannerisms to our neighbors and guests. Compared to Hadith 14 [about the sacredness of life, chastity, and fidelity – Ed.], good treatment is obliged on a broader group, which may include [toward] those who are not Muslim. Following this sacred advice leads to elevation of the society in its mannerisms and etiquette, and exemplifies the uniqueness of Islāmic values. These behaviors are actually very important in contemporary society where there is widespread deterioration of values and manners within the Muslim world. Altogether, this advice given by the Prophet (pbuh) leads to a more peaceful and harmonious Islāmic society in this life, while attaining the pleasure of Allah in the Hereafter.

Dr. Jamal Ahmed Badi is a professor at the International University of Malaysia. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science from Portland State University in 1982 and a Bachelor's from the Islamic University of al-Madinah al-Munawarah in Usuluddin and Da'wah, with honors. He obtained his Master's degree in 1990 and Doctorate in Usuluddin in 1994, both with honors.



The Ties That Bind

She looked at herself in the mirror with tears streaming down her face. She could no longer keep it inside and felt that she had to tell her mother today. But, would her mother even believe her that her uncle had been touching her in places that no one should be touching? This was her mother's brother. How would her mother react when she hears that it had been going on for a few weeks, ever since her uncle had moved in with them? He had warned her not to say a word, and that it was all her fault anyway that this was happening. She was 13 and afraid, but knew she had to tell her mother or it would never stop. If it didn't stop, she didn't know what she was going to do. The thought of it was unbearable. She wiped her tears and opened the door, ready to talk to her mother, but who did she find waiting for her when she opened the door? Her uncle...

Sexual abuse is a more common phenomenon in the Muslim community than we would ever care to believe, yet we do not face it head on as we should. It is a topic that people ignore and when it is brought up, heads begin shaking, as if to say "Shh! There's no need to talk about that...Muslims don't do that." Yes, it is considered taboo, but the very fact that we won't talk about this dire issue allows abuse to persist. Young girls and boys are afraid to tell anyone when it happens to them, and parents are reluctant to teach their children about boundaries, gently yet directly letting their children know that no one has the right to touch their private parts, or touch them in any way that makes them uncomfortable. If a child is not equipped with that knowl-

edge, when an incident occurs, he or she suffers in the agony of silence and shame. And if the abuse is suspected or found out, it is too often ignored or hushed up, particularly if the abuser is considered religious or is a respected family member. This is a terrible betrayal of the child.

Victimized by Someone They Knew

According to statistics by the Crimes Against Children Research Center, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are victims of sexual abuse. These numbers are believed to be lower than the actual number of cases since most sexual abuse of children goes unreported. And when we think of sexual abuse, we may automatically think of a stranger as being the perpetrator of these acts, but this is not usually the case. According to the National Institute of Justice Report, three out of four adolescents who have been sexually assaulted were victimized by someone they knew well. The same is the case for younger children.

It is just not enough to teach children about "stranger danger" since the person more likely to sexually abuse a child is one who has easy access to him or her and earns the child's trust, like a family member, teacher, religious figure, or family friend. The emotional and psychological consequences of this betrayal, from both the abuser and those who cover it up, are catastrophic. If we don't do something as a community to tackle this issue, we are responsible for acquiescing to, and enabling, this abuse and betrayal.

Stop Ignoring the Issue of Sexual Abuse

By Saadia Z. Yunus, MA, LMFT

According to the National Institute of Justice Report, three out of four adolescents who have been sexually assaulted were victimized by someone they knew well

A Campaign to Raise Awareness About Sexual Abuse

We, as community members, must raise awareness about this shattering issue. Families and communities are broken apart when sexual abuse occurs. But our children are precious, and shame and fear must not win out over doing what is right. The worry about life being disrupted, or the ruinous consequences for the perpetrator, if he or she is within the family or community circle, must not be stronger than the fear of a child being set up for lifelong pain and misery.

We must clearly convey this message about sexual abuse in workshops, Islamic schools, and masajid so that people are informed and equipped with the tools on how to appropriately handle such a situation. Community leaders and imams must be at the forefront of this campaign to raise awareness by organizing or supporting workshops and events on this topic. The community can invite Muslim mental health professionals to provide informative lectures on sexual abuse. The future of the ummah depends on our willingness to face all issues, however challenging or ugly. We must show ourselves to be among those who stand up for justice, even if against ourselves or our inner circle, and especially for the protection and defense of our children. We must be silent no more.

Saadia Z. Yunus is a Marriage and Family Therapist. She can be contacted at her website: www.saadiazunus.com.

SCHOOLED ON BULLYING



By Dhuha Baig

It's the first day of school and students across America are boarding bumble-bee buses on their trek to an education. Parents wave teary goodbyes at the kiss-and-ride and some, not too much later, line up in the main office to drop off brown paper bags of forgotten lunches, textbooks, or doctor's notes. Classrooms are colorful, newly decorated and freshly perfumed. The white boards have erased all signs of summer school, and name tags are written and passed out, a sharpie scent attached to the back-to-school clothing of the children.

Taking the first steps up the bus holds the same effect and triumph as climbing a mountain, but that can be destroyed when a student's headscarf is yanked off when she is first seated. In such a hostile environment, it

is not surprising that a Muslim student changes out of her long, modest dress in the school bathroom, to emerge dressed like the other girls. Yet no parent can ever envision their daughter doing this. The classrooms are colorful yes, but that color is muddied with hateful slurs spewed against the boys with more melanin. And as name tags are being passed out, "ISIS" is scribbled on one and passed to the hands of an immigrant.

In the current Islamophobic environment, there has been a huge uptick in Muslims seeking help — predominantly teenagers — with school bullying, depression, substance abuse, and other issues, according to the nonprofit group Crisis Text Line. Muslims (48 percent) are more likely than Americans of other major religious groups to say they, personally, have experienced racial or religious discrimination in the past year. According to a survey by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), 42 percent of Muslim students in K-12 get bullied by other students or teachers in public schools. This and other surveys have found that there has been a marked rise in school bullying, particularly against Muslim children, since the election of the 45th U.S. President.

"The Trump Effect" has found its way into homes, small town supermarkets, buses, and city squares. According to a study done by the Southern Poverty Law Center, this new wave of emboldened, politicized bullying, following the election of Donald Trump, has swept its way through school doors too, and directly arises from comments the President has made about immigrants and minorities. Muslim children, especially, have been primary targets for hate incidents. While the SPLC's results are not scientific, the organization says a "tremendous number of responses as well as the overwhelming confirmation of what has been anecdotally reported in the media cannot be ignored or dismissed."

Categories of Bullying

The National Centre Against Bullying states that there are four major categories of bullying: physical, verbal, cyber, and social. Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, and other bodily violations, all of which can potentially cause both short-term and

Throughout my school career, I witnessed far too many suicides, too many bullying incidents, and too much hate. "This is my America too," I would say time and time again. "This is my home too." It is painful to think about our youth being attacked in buses and afraid to practice Islam in their schools

long-term damage. Verbal bullying is a form of assault that single-handedly destroys the "but words can't hurt me" bromide. Verbal bullying erodes a sense of belonging and safety, and can escalate to physical bullying. Social bullying, also called covert bullying, is akin to backbiting, whether by spreading rumors about someone, making up embarrassing stories, or excluding the individual from group activities. This type of bullying is done anonymously, with the intention to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Lastly, cyber bullying is endemic to the 21st century. Through digital technologies and social media software, a screen serves as a false protection to hands sliding across a keyboard. Children, teenagers, and adults alike become perpetrators and victims, easily trapped in a new and harmful game of cat and mouse, in a society unprepared to deal with the damage. Hand-in-hand with the phenomenon of bullying, is a culture that promotes unrealistic beauty standards, immodesty in dress and behavior, hyper-competitiveness, an "anything goes" mentality, and consumerist values. Such an ethos feeds and whitewashes bullying.

Are parents equipped to handle situations of bullying in an appropriate and effective way? I have yet to experience the honor of being a parent. However, as a teacher and someone who deals with youth and children quite often, I witness a variety of parents, and I similarly witness the way situations are handled when it comes to challenging experiences their children face. I too often see parents brush aside, minimize, or ignore the issue. Teenagers feel uncomfortable speaking to their parents about mental health, school, or social issues. Youth fear disappointing their parents. There is a desperate need for communication; and the only way these issues can be resolved is if we start talking about them. Parents must do a better job at creating the space for their children to grow,

while simultaneously building a relationship that allows their child to come to them and confide both their positive and negative experiences. The children who are bullied need the support and guidance that parents can offer, but only will seek that if they feel assured they will not be denigrated, disbelieved, or made to feel guilty.

The rise of discrimination specifically against our Muslim students is quite disturbing. Walking through the doors of their school, they can be faced with comments such as "oh no, the rag-head Taliban is here" or "we all think you are a terrorist" or "is that a bomb in your backpack?" It is gut-wrenching that sometimes these comments are made by teachers, the very same adults tasked with the responsibility to create safe spaces of learning and growth. Ethnically and religiously fueled bullying against Muslim students is sharpened with the students being told they don't belong, that the color of their skin is associated with violence, or that their names instantly make them terrorists. Day in and day out, they are labeled as less American and less human. Yet, this is a country which promises religious freedom and protection from persecution; so, it is entirely unacceptable that our students feel unwelcome and unsafe.

What Are Our Communities and Schools Doing About Bullying?

The rise in prejudice against Muslim students is forcing schools to change and to diversify their anti-bullying programs. Students are being bullied about their weight, appearance, hair, clothes, skin color, socio-economic status, and religion. While the ISPU's study estimates that over 70 percent of bullying is based on racial and cultural bias and group differences, most anti-bullying programs do not incorporate cultural sensitiv-

Guidance From Al-Quran

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"O ye who believe!
Fear Allah as He should be
feared, and die not except in a
state of Islam. And hold fast,
all together, by the rope which
Allah (stretches out for you),
and be not divided among
yourselves..."

(Al-Quran, Chapter 3,
Verses 102-103)

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ity training. Regarding the bullying of Muslim students, teachers need to be informed about Islam so as to properly address the bullying occurring in their classrooms. In a nation where 43 percent of Millennial adults are non-white (Pew Research Center), it is imperative that school districts adjust their teacher training in order to create a healthier school setting for all their students. However, schools account for only a portion of a student's life. Communities must do their part to address bullying. There is no room for any form of discrimination, racism, or misogyny in the religion of Islam. Masjids, imams, and community leaders must understand the complexities of life faced by the youth, and address those issues.

We enjoy talking about how youth are the future of the Ummah. However, we often forget that the future starts tomorrow. If our youth are being discriminated against and/or bullied in schools and social interactions, they grow up feeling unsafe, excluded, and degraded. Our future, then, is in trouble. Muslim youth are facing the most difficult time of their

lives, and the fear of social rejection is very much present. I have just graduated from high school, and I think I was one of the few who were blessed to attend a wonderfully diverse, socially inclusive high school. Our Muslim Student's Association (MSA) club welcomed over 35 students weekly for jummah, and our admin were present at every single one of our events. Even with that positive support, it is much too easy to fall victim to the fear of not fitting in.

Throughout my school career, I witnessed far too many suicides, too many bullying incidents, and too much hate. "This is my America too," I would say time and time again. "This is my home too." It is painful to think about our youth being attacked in buses and afraid to practice Islam in their schools. This is an American problem, and the solution sits in our hands, quite literally. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah [peace and blessings of Allah be upon him] say, 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he

is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith" (Muslim).

We must allow our hands to reach out across generational, sectarian, and religious lines. Our feet must walk our children to school, but must also walk alongside them through their everyday struggles, no matter how difficult or unpleasant. We must take back our names in a time where others are defining our words for us, and we must be unapologetic, proud, and true to our ideals and principles. Bullying is a global issue, but starts at home, and as your children climb up the steps of the bumble bee buses and take their seats on their trek to an education, we must do our very best at home and in our communities to equip them with the knowledge they need to remain strong.

Dhuha Baig is currently an undergraduate student at George Mason University, majoring in Government and International Politics, with a minor in Islamic Studies.



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Bullying Muslim Youth: Bringing it to Light and Fixing it

By
Miyarah
Robertson

I have attended public school my entire life. As I have gotten older, the degree of bullying that has happened to me, as well as to many of my Muslim friends, has gotten much worse, year after year. The amount of bullying is increasing at an alarming rate because of the environment of ignorance that we live in. Muslim children are being stereotyped as terrorists, being told to go home when they are fully registered citizens of this country, and worst of all, some are being told to commit suicide.

Unfortunately, more of the bullying happens to young Muslim women as opposed to men because our Islamic dress is mandatory and highly visible. Through elementary school, as I was making the change to wear the hijab, I was extremely positive about it as well as excited. However, my classmates began to treat me like a different person. People who I thought were my friends acted like they didn't know me. Boys began to verbally bully me, and there was also an occasion when a boy attempted to put his hands on me and start a physical altercation.

Both my sister and I have had someone try and pull off our hijabs. One of my middle school friends was asked, "How are you supposed to hide a bomb in those clothes? Where are your Muslim clothes?!" My friend was unable to verbally defend herself, so I proceeded to step in. The problem is becoming so bad that young Muslim women are removing their hijabs, verbal altercations are turning into physical attacks, and some Muslim youth are committing suicide. It's becoming more and more difficult for Muslim children and youth to attend public schools. Both the Muslim community and the larger American society need to work as hard as possible to bring this issue to light and fix it.

Miyarah Robertson is a 9th grade honor student, youth leader in her mosque, and spoken word artist.

Your Young Child Is Being Bullied: What Should You Do?

By Samya Ali

Bullying happens too often in schools, both in public and Islamic schools, and parents often don't know what to do to help their child when he or she is a victim of bullying. When a parent becomes aware that their child is being bullied, it's very important to address the issue immediately in order to avoid the negative effects of bullying. Often times the child who is bullied lacks competent social skills, and a parent can start with that as their area of focus. Researcher Clark McKown of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center in Chicago and colleagues published the results of a recent study in the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*. This study showed that children with social problems were lacking competence in reading nonverbal cues, understanding the social meaning of those cues, or knowing how to resolve a social conflict.

Studies in the past have shown that children who are subjected to bullying are likely to have problems in various other aspects of their lives. In addition to feeling unsafe, the child who is subjected to bullying feels the misery of social rejection.

This can lead to poor academic performance and other more serious problems as the child gets older. Wanting to feel accepted and liked by his or her peers is extremely important to a child. Yet some children simply lack the social skills that allow them to navigate their way successfully on the playground, in groups of children playing together, or in any casual interaction with peers whether in the classroom, in the hallway, or during lunch at the cafeteria.

In the McKown study, it was found that the children with reported social problems had difficulty reading the emotions of actors in video clips and photos. The facial expression, tone of voice, and body posturing did not provide the cues that the average child could detect and interpret without difficulty. Thus it is not easy for the less socially adept child to notice a frown on another child who thinks that he is keeping the ball too long. Or a girl playing with three others may not pick up on the impatience the others are showing when she is unable to throw the ball quickly to keep their game going.

Practice Social Skills with Your Child

If you have a young child who is being bullied and you have observed that he or she struggles in social interactions, or a teacher has provided feedback that your child lacks adequate social skills, you can aid your child by practicing social skills with him or her. Remember that your child probably shies away from social situations that would provide the opportunity for him to practice basic skills with his peers. So you can provide that opportunity. You can role play with your child different social scenarios. For example, tell your child that you are going to pretend that the two of you are on the playground playing tag. Instruct your child to grab your arm and not let go instead of "tagging" you with his hand. Ask him to watch your face and tell you what your expression means. When he grabs your arm and won't let go, make an exaggerated frown. Ask your child to tell you what the frown means and to identify what happened that made you frown. If he doesn't understand the connection between the frown and him not following the usual rule of tagging with the hand (rather than grabbing the arm and not letting go), explain it with

Make sure that your home is a place where your child feels safe and secure, physically as well as emotionally. Your child should always feel that he/she can openly and honestly communicate with you. Let your child know that together you can solve any problem or handle any challenge

an another example such as "If you were playing ball and your friend kept throwing the ball over the fence on purpose, how would you feel?" Ask your child what he could do when he sees a frown on a playmate's face. Explain that he can stop and think about his own behavior and if he is following the rules, acting in a friendly way, playing cooperatively, and so on. If he doesn't understand why his friend is annoyed, he can ask himself, "Am I doing something the wrong way?"

You can be very creative and have a lot of fun with your child coming up with various scenarios like the one above to teach him to observe facial expressions, hear tones of voice, and see body language -- and make sure he understands what all this means.

For all children, young and old, it is also very important to make sure that they have some basic guidelines as to how to respond when bullying does occur. There is a nonprofit organization that provides very practical steps that you can teach your child in this regard. Their website is www.kidpower.org. The guidelines are available at: <http://www.kidpower.org/library/article/prevent-bullying/>

Providing Support for Your Child

In all cases, make sure that you are supportive of your child and that he knows he can tell you anytime about what is going on at school and anything that he is having difficulty with. Never convey the idea to your child that he should ignore the bullying or that he is somehow to blame. Make sure he knows that bullying is wrong and that it is not his fault. Let him know the Islamic teachings about mocking others, calling them names, or talking badly about other people. You can read with your child Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 11, and discuss the meaning on an age-appropriate level: "O you who believe! Let not some men

among you laugh at others; it may be that the [latter] are better than the [former]. Nor let some women laugh at others; it may be that the [latter] are better than the [former]. Nor defame or be sarcastic to each other or call each other by [offensive] nicknames; ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness [to be used of one] after he has believed. And those who do not desist are doing wrong."

When your child is bullied, gently try to get him or her to talk about the bullying so that you can elicit information and details about when, where, and how it happens. Talk to your child's teacher and, if necessary, the school principal and let them know that you want to work with them to ensure that your child is not subjected to bullying. Most importantly, make sure that your home is a place where your child feels safe and secure, physically as well as emotionally. Your child should always feel that he/she can openly and honestly communicate with you. Let your child know that together you can solve any problem or handle any challenge and that with patience and perseverance the solution will be found.

As the parent of a child who is suffering from harassment, be aware of your own feelings and do not let them run unrestrained in your desire to protect and comfort your child. Remember that this is a great opportunity to work with your child and help him or her to develop effective coping skills and assertiveness skills. Quality of life and good mental health are directly related to the awareness of one's emotions and the ability to manage them in a healthy and productive manner; as well as the awareness of others' emotions, and the ability to understand and respond competently to them. Ask Allah SWT to help you be patient and perseverant in your efforts to help your child. Do everything in your capacity and then leave the rest up to Allah SWT.

Samya Ali is a free lance writer for The Message magazine.



ICNA COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE LAUNCHES

NATIONAL STOP BULLYING CAMPAIGN

By Abu Aqila

Three years ago, Nadia and her older sister made the joint decision, independent of their parents' input, to wear hijab (head and body covering for Muslim females for the sake of modesty) to their public elementary school. Their mother dresses in full hijab every day that she steps outside of her family's front door and her daughters have benefited from the example of a strong hijabi mother. Before making the decision to wear hijab to school, Nadia was a popular but quiet girl who was very rarely the target of bullies in her school. All of that changed when the two sisters showed up one day with scarves on their heads and legs and arms covered by loosely-fitting garments. At first, the taunting and bullying was more playful than mean-spirited, but as the weeks and months went by, it became obvious that some of their schoolmates were directing hurtful comments towards them that were echoed from television, older youth, parents, teachers, and even school administrators.

School bullying in America is as old as one-room school houses with a single teacher for first through the twelfth grades. During the approximately 100-year post-slavery era of racially-segregated public schools, racial homogeneity did not spare children from being ridiculed and picked on by their class and schoolmates. Yet, as the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of schools became more diverse, school bullying increased exponentially. Racial and ethnic epithets were now hurled at children by their peers and adults. In school districts where racial and religious bigotry dominate



the landscape, many children are mercilessly mocked and derided with impunity. Because of the seemingly cavalier attitude taken by far too many teachers and school administrators nationwide, when incidents of bullying are reported to them and they do nothing to stop it, children are being emotionally scarred, some permanently.

Children from minority populations in this country, such as Jews, Latinos, African Americans, Muslims, Sikhs, and Asians, are routinely on the receiving end of barbed threats, insults, physical intimidation and attacks. As the political climate in America becomes more toxic, even very young children are not spared from verbal and physical torment on a day-to-day basis. Sadly, bullying has become normative behavior against anyone considered different from the majority population group. As a direct result of school and cyberbullying, children, ages 10-14, currently have the highest rate of suicide in the country. Education, social activist, and religious-based groups are taking a nationwide stance to inform and mobilize the

American people against bullying and the deleterious effect that this behavior is having on our precious children and the country at large. The Islamic Circle of North America, through its civic engagement division, ICNA Council for Social Justice, is taking a stand against school bullying by waging a year-long national campaign, "Protecting Our Children: Stop School Bullying."

The national campaign will be spearheaded by the ICNA Council for Social Justice in conjunction with local units and subunits of ICNA. The organization will utilize its multi-platform social media outlets, billboards, and the mass media to promote the campaign. This national awareness campaign is designed to mobilize diverse demographic populations to take individual and collective actions in their school districts to reduce, if not eliminate, the unacceptable practice of school bullying. Parents, teachers, teacher unions, school administrators and superintendents, and students, themselves, are the target audience of this initiative. Most of the children bullied in school do not report to their parents

or school authorities that they have been victimized, primarily for fear of reprisals against them. ICNA Council for Social Justice has established a Justice Hotline, 1 (844) 99-JUSTICE, for individuals to call and report incidents of bullying or other social injustices. In addition, ICNA CSJ will facilitate sensitivity sessions for teachers and school administrators to make them aware of this serious problem and to push them to take appropriate action when incidents of bullying are reported. As part of the national campaign, mayors and city councils will be called upon to establish "Stop Bullying Our Children" days in their areas. School principals will be called upon to hold special assemblies to address bullying in schools and online. Faith community leaders will also be enlisted to help stem this worrisome tide.

For additional information, please contact Rameez Abid through the Justice Hotline: (844) 99-Justice; or email rameez@icnacsj.org.

Abu Aqila is a freelance writer for *The Message International* magazine.



Effects of Bullying

- Students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression (Center for Disease Control, 2015).
- Students who engage in bullying behavior are at increased risk for academic problems, substance use, and violent behavior later in adolescence and adulthood (Center for Disease Control, 2015).
- Students who are both targets of bullying and engage in bullying behavior are at greater risk for both mental health and behavior problems than students who only bully or are only bullied (Center for Disease Control, 2015).
- Students who experience bullying are twice as likely as non-bullied peers to experience negative health effects such as headaches and stomachaches (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013).
- Youth who self-blame and conclude they deserved to be bullied are more likely to face negative outcomes, such as depression, prolonged victimization, and maladjustment (Perren, Ettakal, & Ladd, 2013; Shelley & Craig, 2010).

Source:
<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp>

Bullying and Suicide

The relationship between bullying and suicide is complex. Many media reports oversimplify this relationship, insinuating or directly stating that bullying can cause suicide. The facts tell a different story. In particular, it is not accurate and potentially dangerous to present bullying as the "cause" or "reason" for a suicide, or to suggest that suicide is a natural response to bullying. We recommend media not use the word "bully-cide."

- Research indicates that persistent bullying can lead to or worsen feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair, as well as depression and anxiety, which can contribute to suicidal behavior.
- The vast majority of young people who are bullied do not become suicidal.
- Most young people who die by suicide have multiple risk factors.
- Some youth, such as LGBT youth, are at increased risk for suicide attempts even when bullying is not a factor.

Source:
<https://www.stopbullying.gov/media/facts/index.html#suicide>



ICNA'S CSJ NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

STOP BULLYING OUR (MUSLIM) CHILDREN

By Hamza Ansari

Bullying is physical, emotional, or social harassment, intimidation, or aggression toward a perceived weaker individual or group with the deliberate intent to cause them harm. It is a serious problem that plagues America. Many children are bullied at some point while growing up. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, more than one out of every five students (20.8 percent), ages 12 through 18, reported being bullied during the 2014-2015 school year. Bullying can occur in a variety of places such as a classroom, playground, cafeteria, or bathroom. Many people think of a bully as a large, male

figure that physically bullies his smaller counterparts. However, anyone can bully, regardless of their size or gender. A person can bully by excluding a person from an activity, destroying someone's property, name calling or insulting, spreading rumors, or physically intimidating or harming them. Cyberbullying involves posting something insulting or embarrassing on social media about another person.

It is important for school staff, parents, and students to stay attentive to any signs that a child/youth is being bullied, as a victim does not always confide their experiences to anyone, out of fear or

embarrassment. According to stopbullying.gov, some of the signs of bullying include unexplainable injuries, lost or destroyed belongings, feeling sick or faking illness, or changes in eating habits.

Muslims students have experienced a lot of bullying since 9/11 and again are facing an upsurge with the increasingly xenophobic and anti-Muslim environment today. Bullying based on one's religion can make it difficult to have strong iman and make a child ashamed of his or her Islamic identity. Khadijah Rivera, a nine-year-old girl who wears the hijab, endures a lot of bullying from her peers. She deals with everything, from insults

and profanity directed at her, to slaps to her face and threats to her life. Khadijah's mother decided to home school her to try and shield her from the abuse, but she continued to be bullied by the children in her neighborhood. Although she is not obligated to wear the hijab until she reaches puberty, Khadijah wanted to wear the hijab because she likes it, and because her mother wears it as well. However, Khadijah felt overwhelmed by the torment she faced daily, and decided to stop wearing the hijab until she felt more confident. It is very important that the Muslim community support children who are bullied and not assume that the problem will go away as the children grow older. Problems must be addressed immediately, otherwise they may persist and grow into more complex issues that will negatively affect them later in life.

Preventing and Addressing Bullying — What Educators Can Do

1) Educate children about bullying and be clear about what is expected of them with regard to this issue.

Ground rules should be set on the first day of school. A good way to ensure that children will follow these rules is to have the class come up with the rules together, guided by the teacher. Children will better follow the rules when they claim them as their own. These rules should clearly define what behaviors constitute bullying, and what will and will not be tolerated. Consequences for violating rules should also be determined and spelled out. Teachers should explain the physical and/or psychological damage that can result from bullying. Students should be made aware that bullies can come in all shapes and sizes. Anyone who attacks another person, whether verbally or physically, who makes threats, insults, mocks, spreads rumors — that person, regardless of age or strength or gender, is a bully.

2) Educate staff members about bullying and emphasize the importance of being role models.

Children closely observe the behavior of others, especially older peers and adults, in order to learn what is socially acceptable. It is important that teachers

Muslim community support children who are bullied and not assume that the problem will go away as the children grow older. Problems must be addressed immediately, otherwise they may persist and grow into more complex issues that will negatively affect them later in life

do not do anything that could be defined as bullying. Teachers should make sure that if they playfully tease a student or the class that it steers clear of insult or mockery. It is important to raise the awareness of teachers and administrators about the difference between being firm with students and being mean. And children learn to respect others when they feel respected by the adults in their lives.

3) Create an environment where kids feel safe.

A teacher must show that he or she cares about the well-being of each and every student. An aspect of that genuine caring is creating an environment in which the students feel safe, both intellectually and emotionally. Such a teacher lets students know in a variety of ways that they can come to the teacher with a problem such as bullying. When a child does come to a teacher for support, remind them that you and others are there to help them and assure them that they will be alright. Listen to all their concerns without judging them. Give them advice on what action they can take themselves to stop the bullying, as it can be empowering and help build their confidence. Also, show that you care and will be persistent in making sure that the bullying ends. Students should support one another and get help for those who are being bullied if they do not seek help themselves.

4) Have students engage in activities such as skits, creative writing, or brainstorming that relate to bullying.

Anti-bullying messages will become more ingrained and deeply understood when relevant activities are incorporated into the curriculum. These activities will give students creative and engaging ways to explore and understand bullying and its harmful effects, rather than

simply hearing facts and clichés repeated over and over again. Children, especially younger ones, may not realize that their behavior is too rough or that incessant teasing or other negative behavior is harmful to others. Sometimes they have to be taught the boundaries of healthy interactions with other children.

5) Have a reporting system that is clear and effective.

Establish straightforward and clear procedures for students to report incidents of bullying. Make sure they know that all reports of bullying will be taken seriously. A reporting system should allow students the option to remain anonymous. Reports should also be kept on record so that any recurring problems or patterns will be evident and appropriate action can be taken.

6) Take an anti-bullying pledge.

All students and staff members should take an anti-bullying pledge. A pledge makes the campaign against bullying official and provides a sense of seriousness and responsibility. The pledge should include a promise to follow all rules and also to report any instances of bullying.

7) Be vigilant so that any signs of possible bullying can be reported and stopped.

All staff — teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others in contact with students on a regular basis — should stay alert for signs that a student might be the victim of bullying. Staff should never treat conflict among students lightly, as it can involve bullying or lead to bullying in the future. Students should also be observant and report possible cases of bullying immediately. Someone who bullies is not likely to do it in front of a teacher. However, they will become comfortable doing it in front

A person can bully by excluding a person from an activity, destroying someone's property, name calling or insulting, spreading rumors, or physically intimidating or harming them. Cyberbullying involves posting something insulting or embarrassing on social media about another person.

of their peers if they think they can get away with it and not face any repercussions. Extra effort should go into monitoring areas where bullying occurs most, such as bathrooms and cafeterias. Avoid being passive and thinking "kids will be kids" or that the situation will resolve itself.

8) Establish consequences for bullying.

Once an anti-bullying pledge has been taken and a reporting system put in place, students realize that bullying will not be tolerated and that reported incidents will be taken seriously. This will help students feel safer, as well as be more likely to report bullying. When incidents are reported and cases of bullying addressed, students will be less likely to engage in bullying behaviors.

The student who bullies should make amends for any wrongs he committed. This can include paying for damaged property, if any, and writing a letter of apology to the one he or she bullied. They can also be given the assignment of giving a speech to the class about bullying and its harmful effects, or be assigned a certain number of hours in community service. Detentions and suspensions, in general, are not effective in that they are purely punitive and have little remedial effect.

9) Teach children methods that can be used to discourage or put an end to bullying.

Children should be taught ways to effectively deal with a bully so that they may be able to put a stop to a bullying incident before the situation escalates. Teaching them to ignore, walk away, or assertively say "stop" or "no" to a bully helps to build confidence. It is also crucial to empower and encourage bystanders to do their part, as proactive bystand-

ers can deter bullying. Bystanders must step in to stop the situation or report the bullying as soon as possible.

10) Seek intervention from outside sources if necessary.

Call the police in severe cases of assault, extortion, or hate crimes. Call paramedics for medical attention if needed. If the incident of bullying was severe, all the parties involved may need professional counseling. This is especially necessary for the victim if the bullying was traumatic or chronic. Someone who bullies may also need counseling in order to discover the reason that they engaged in bullying.

Preventing and Addressing Bullying — What Parents Can Do

1) Parents should educate themselves about healthy parenting.

Parents must avoid harmful and abusive behaviors. This includes out-of-control yelling at the child, insulting, name calling, and beating. Children mimic the behaviors of the adults in their lives. Abusive, bullying behavior by parents can result in the child treating their peers in the same way. A child may also bully others as an illusory and destructive way to reclaim a sense of control and self-worth. A healthy rela-

tionship and open lines of communication between parents and children is also critical.

2) Parents can encourage their older youth to start or join their school's Muslim Student Association.

It can feel difficult at times to be a strong Muslim if one constantly sees and hears messages in the media portraying Islam and Muslims in a negative light. This challenge is exacerbated if a Muslim student is harassed or bullied because of their faith. Being with other Muslims makes it easier to get through tough times. A well-established and active MSA will also garner the respect of others and possibly reduce the risk of bullying towards Muslims. Students should find out the protocol and requirements of starting a club at their school. After the MSA has at least a few members, various events for other Muslims and also non-Muslim students can be planned.

3) Parents should contact the school and address concerns about their child being bullied as soon as possible.

Parents should be aware that sometimes teachers and administrators do not witness and do not know that a child is being bullied. They should never delay taking action if they know or suspect that their child is a victim of bullying. Hoping the situation will resolve itself just lets the wound fester. Parents must view themselves as partners with teachers and school staff. They have opportunities to know when their child is suffering or their behavior changes at home in some negative way. After speaking with the child, if they suspect or know that bullying is taking place, they must take action by notifying the school and working with school staff to make sure that the bullying is stopped and their child feels safe.

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Resources:

www.thebullyproject.com

www.stopbullying.gov

<https://www.youtube.com/user/StopBullyingGov>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/warning-signs/index.html>

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

A Netflix documentary, *InnSai, The Power of Intuition*, features a school in the U.K. where children are taught about the brain and how it functions, about mindful awareness, positive psychology, and social-emotional learning. One young boy's story stands out. He was a friendly boy but he would at times get a little rough with his peers on the playground during recess. He didn't understand why the boys were put off by his behavior. When the class started a curriculum called MindUp, they learned about the amygdala, the part of the brain where the "fight or flight" response is located. The children achieved an understanding of how stress of any sort can trigger the amygdala and, when that happens, other parts of the brain are shut out of the action. That includes the prefrontal cortex, the area that controls higher brain functions including attention and orientation, self-awareness, maintaining information in the working memory, changing behavior to suit the demands of a task or circumstance, and decision-making.

BULLYING, EMPATHY, AND REFLECTING UPON OURSELVES

By Um Abdu-Rahman

Prefrontal Cortex Dysfunction and Impulsivity, an article published in 2012 on the Center for Science & Law blog, states, “The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is an area of the brain associated with the regulation of impulsive behavior, helping see the future consequences of one’s actions rather than seeking immediate rewards. Studies have established that damage to the PFC causes patients to be oblivious to future consequences and focus only on immediate reward, unable to regulate their behavior to be in accordance with long-goals. The PFC’s connectivity to other brain regions gives insights to the means by which it may regulate impulsive behavior. For instance, it has an inhibitory projection to the amygdala, a subcortical structure associated with violent behavior.”

The children in the U.K. school were taught the practice of slowing down, breathing deeply, and staying focused and aware. This puts more time between an experience that might trigger stress or negative emotion and the child’s reactivity to that experience. This helps other parts of the brain, like the pre-frontal cortex, to maintain command. The young boy, mentioned above, had impulse control issues that were not the result of injury to his brain but the common behavioral trait of young children. After his class was taught about the different parts of the brain and what they control, and how to practice mindfulness, his habit of teasing and harassing his classmates changed significantly. Because he understood what was happening in his brain (even if only in an elementary way), he did not so easily slide into frantic, over-excited behavior that involved him in annoying or intimidating his peers. Over time, with practice, he strengthened his mindfulness like one strengthens a muscle, and became a more self-aware and emotionally intelligent young man. In the documentary, he, along with others from his class, were interviewed. Their ability, though very young, to verbalize an understanding of regions of the brain and the behaviors and capacities they controlled was quite impressive.

Many studies have looked at both the behaviors and personalities of bullies. Not surprisingly, those who bully others lack prosocial behavior. Their self-concept is typically, on a conscious level, a positive one, but bullies do not have healthy or satisfying relationships

with either peers or parents. Perhaps a young person who bullies others has, himself or herself, had many stressful experiences which invoked a chronic heightened state of alert, of feeling existentially threatened, with the amygdala in control. In that state in which the “fight or flight” instinct is so easily triggered, important aspects of development get sidelined. Only when the amygdala is calm and quiet can a child learn, whether cognitively, emotionally, or socially.

Bullying Is Everywhere

Bullying is a world-wide phenomenon. NoBullying.com is a clearinghouse of educational material aimed to bring attention to this issue and help stop bullying in all its forms. They cite statistics and studies done around the world about the prevalence of bullying in schools. For example, a study published in the International Journal of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine in 2016 looked at bullying in Saudi Arabia. In “Bullying in early adolescence: An exploratory study in Saudi Arabia,” by Fadia S. Al Buhairan, Majid Al Eissa, Nourah Al Kufeidy, and Maha Al Muneef, the researchers write, “In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), bullying has only been addressed very recently. Some large scale epidemiological studies have been conducted in recent years and have provided national estimates for the prevalence of bullying. Jeeluna, a national study addressing the health needs of adolescents in the KSA, found that 25% of students had reported being exposed to bullying within the past one month preceding the study. Males were more likely to engage in bullying compared to females (27.1% versus 22.7%). Adults in the KSA reported their adverse childhood experiences, including exposure to bullying during the first 18 years of their lives. It was found that 21.5% of adults reported exposure to peer violence during their childhood, with males reporting this more often than females (28.2% versus 14.7%). Although there appears to be insufficient awareness of the issue, bullying is apparently prevalent in KSA, as is the case in other parts of the world.” In Saudi Arabia, bullying tends to be centered around identifiers of tribe or foreign nationalities. Another study, commissioned by Microsoft, focused

on the pervasiveness of online bullying around the world. It found, for example, that among youth in Egypt, 8 to 17 years old, 27 percent responded that they had been victims of online bullying, and 63 percent indicated that they had been bullied offline (schools and other locations).

What this means is that Muslims also bully, even though Islamic teachings guide us to avidly avoid this harmful behavior. Power dynamics infuse all human relations. There is a tendency for the more assertive personality to want to control the other. More egalitarian relationship dynamics do exist when both parties are aware of relationship dynamics and are more interested in establishing harmony than in one or both seeking to excessively influence or dominate the other. The issue of healthy vs. unhealthy power dynamics also exists between parent and child. When we think of bullying, we automatically think of school-related, peer-on-peer bullying. Sadly, however, too many parents bully their children. The bullying parent uses humiliation, intimidation, insults, and other threatening behavior to cause discomfort to the smaller, weaker individual, in this case the child, or force them to do something like do their homework, get good grades, or clean their room. The parent who bullies his or her child might not cross the line to physical bullying. But emotional and mental bullying has just as injurious effects. The parent who bullies most likely thinks he is just disciplining the child, or trying to motivate or “get through” to the child. Unfortunately, bullying from a parent destroys a child’s sense of safety and breaks down their feeling of worthiness. This sets the child up for a lifetime of dysfunctional relationships. And the child might himself or herself become a bully, whether with peers or as an adult with his/her own children.

To Bully or to Empathize — or Both

We might wonder how an adult could act in a mean, threatening way with his or her own child. Do they not see and feel how the child cowers and feels pain in being treated in such an insensitive and harsh way? Where is the parent’s empathy? It’s interesting that some studies suggest that bullies don’t necessarily lack empathy, they just choose to use

their ability to identify with and understand another person’s thoughts or feelings in a destructive way. Paul Ekman, a psychologist and professor emeritus at the University of California, San Francisco, describes three types of empathy — cognitive, emotional, and empathic concern. Those with cognitive empathy are able to sense how another person thinks and to understand his point of view. Narcissists and sociopaths have this type of empathy. In fact, they use this astuteness to know how to harm their victim, which buttons to push, how to best manipulate or control. Then there are those who have a capacity for emotional empathy and are able to feel what another person is feeling. That, however, does not necessarily mean they will be able or willing to help the other person. In fact, emotional empathy can sometimes lead to the individual feeling distressed and overwhelmed him/herself so that they cannot maintain the broader, calm, and focused mindset needed to help another in distress. To come to the aid of another requires, according to Ekman, empathic concern. Beyond understanding another individual’s perspective and being able to feel their emotion is the intentionality and capacity to help that person.

Empathy in Its Fullest Sense

For our purposes, we can use the word “empathy” in the fullest sense — encompassing cognitive and emotional capacity to sense or know the thoughts, attitudes, or feelings of another person, as well as empathy by which concern for the other leads to action of some sort. Some people are naturally empathic and others must cultivate and nurture this trait in themselves. Empathy is an important aspect of emotional intelligence and is essential to the establishing of healthy and satisfying relationships. Understanding and caring about another person’s emotional reality or the distress they are experiencing is the foundation for the desire to extend kindness, to inspire, and to influence others in a healthy way; and to have intention to relieve whenever possible the suffering of another human being. Empathy is essential in the marriage relationship and in the parent/child relationship. In fact, if parents do not model empathy for their children, the

To care about other people, to advocate for social justice, to have harmonious relationships, to raise healthy children, we need empathy. With empathy, we can serve!

children will likely not feel secure, loved, or warmly cared for. And they too will grow, possibly, with lesser capacity for empathy in its fullest sense.

People who are high in empathy are highly aware of their own emotional reality and willing to enter into the domain of another human being’s emotional reality. A wonderful example of an empathic individual is Imam Hassan Al-Banna (may Allah SWT have mercy on his soul). Consider what he said: “I believe that the best souls are those who see their happiness in making other people happy. This soul derives its joy from increasing the joys of other people and protecting them from any harm. This virtuous soul is able to penetrate to the deepest core of their hearts and feel their pain and contribute to their healing and to understand what is in society which has disturbed their well-being. This soul feels nothing but mercy for all the sons of Adam and has a sincere and pure desire to exert whatever efforts will cure their ill hearts and expand their chests with joy. I believe there is no happier moment than rescuing any creature from the abyss of misery and guiding him to the path of uprightness and happiness.”

- He sees his happiness “in making other people happy.”
- He listens to others and is able to “penetrate to the deepest core of their hearts and feel their pain and contribute to their healing.”
- He feels “nothing but mercy for all the sons of Adam and has a sincere and pure desire to exert whatever efforts will cure their ill hearts and expand their chests with joy.”
- He takes action and his “soul derives its joy from increasing the joys of other people and protecting them from any harm.” And further his action is in “rescuing any creature from the abyss

of misery and guiding him to the path of uprightness and happiness.”

There are numerous verses in the Quran and instructions from the Prophet (peace be upon him) about helping the needy, being compassionate, and acting in ways that alleviate the difficulties and sufferings of other people. The Prophet said, “The most beloved people to Allah SWT are those who help and benefit others the most...” (Al-Tabarani).

Bullying is in diametrical opposition to helping and benefiting others. Certainly, all efforts must be made to prevent and stop bullying in schools. That, however, will be incomplete if we don’t engage in self-examining. Do we seek to unduly control others, whether family members or friends? Do we ever use intimidation, threats, or insulting, demeaning words or actions with our children? Do we tend to want to influence others, “teach them how to live,” but think that we do not need to be influenced by other perspectives or viewpoints?

A project of the Harvard University School of Graduate Education, Making Caring Common, emphasizes the need to “create caring and inclusive schools.” In a report, “Bullying Prevention: The Power of Empathy,” the authors stress the importance of “building empathy at home and in school.” They did a survey with 10,000 student respondents in 35 middle schools and high schools nationwide and “found that in schools where students reported having more empathy, students also reported fewer experiences of bullying and were more likely to try to stop bullying. Students who reported more empathy also reported fewer experiences of discrimination, threats to physical safety, teasing, and bullying at school. Higher reports of empathy were also associated with student reports of feeling more connected to their school and being more influenced by school values.”

To care about other people, to advocate for social justice, to have harmonious relationships, to raise healthy children, we need empathy. With empathy, we can serve. How essential and worthwhile is that? — Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “The highest level of the intellect, after eman, is to be of service to the creation.”

Um Abdu-Rahman is a free lance writer for The Message magazine.



CONFRONTING MUSLIM SECTARIANISM

By Imam Abu Laith Luqman Ahmad

Muslim sectarianism is one of the greatest challenges for Muslims in this century. It affects Muslims worldwide and is responsible for much of the discord in local mosques and the splitting of Muslim communities.

Sectarianism contributes to widespread disunity, displacement of populations, and intrareligious killing amongst Muslims around the globe. So just what is Muslim sectarianism, and how is sectarianism viewed by the sharia?

For starters, we should know that there is no singular type of sectarianism. Muslim sectarianism has many forms and manifestations. Some are extremely violent and harmful, and some are committed to non-violence. Some sects are hyper-cultish with elaborate rituals and liturgical nuance, and some are very simple. Some sects require initiation, and some don't. Some groups are descriptive in their doctrine but not neces-

sarily sectarian in the sense of being narrow-minded or exclusionary; and some are intolerant at their core but vague in their description. Muslim sectarianism is a complicated phenomenon with often deadly consequences. It reveals itself in varying ways according to time, place, people, and sub-ideology. Some Muslim sects are relatively new to the fray and some are hundreds of years old. Some are built around charismatic individuals and others are built around ideas or supplemental philosophies. Some sects are enduring and many others are long forgotten, brief flashes of energy on the timeline of history.

'Sectarianism' and Its Denunciation in the Quran

Let's first take a look at the meaning of the word. According to the New Shorter Oxford Dictionary, a sect is a body or group of people subscribing to views that are divergent from other people of the same religion, usually the orthodoxy; and a sectary is a person who is zealous in the cause of his sect. In common usage, "sectarian" connotes bigotry, discrimination, or hatred arising from attaching relations of inferiority and superiority to differences between subdivisions within a group.

In the Arabic language, hizb can simply mean a group of people, as in the following verse: "And when the true believers saw the clans, [confederate forces] they said: This is that which Allah and His messenger promised us. Allah and His messenger are true. It did but confirm them in their faith and submission" (Quran 33:22). However, hizb is often used in the Quran in a pejorative way, to denounce sectarianism. One example is as follows: "And surely this, your religion, is one religion and I am your Lord, therefore be careful [of your duty] to Me. But they cut their religion among themselves into sects, each part [hizbin] rejoicing in that which is with them" (Quran 23:52-53). Other verses denouncing sectarianism include 3:19, 6:159, and 23:53.

Yet, every Muslim sect has their arguments as to why they are not a sect, why they are not sectarian, or why they are a sect and, and in their assessment, the only true exponents of Islamic doctrine. The general rule of Islam with regards to sectarianism is to avoid it: "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you — when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided" (Quran 3:103). Allah forbade the Prophet (peace be upon him) from supporting sectarianism in our religion, and, as a deterrent to sectarianism, the Prophet warned the people from arguing about religion and religious doctrine. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "No people ever went astray, after

they were guided, except that they were overcome by arguing" (Tirmidhi).

Tackling Muslim Sectarianism

Effectively tackling Muslim sectarianism in the Muslim world is extremely difficult. It's hard to talk about it without arousing sensitivities. Additionally, addressing it is not a palatable frontline topic right now; and thirdly, Muslim sectarianism has been around for a long time so we have become desensitized to it. Thus, many of us have simply resigned ourselves to live with it and accept that there is nothing that we can do about it. However, not all of us have settled for acquiescent silence on this issue. More and more Muslims all over the world are getting sick and tired of sectarianism and its often-deadly consequences.

Muslims and major Islamic organizations in the United States are increasingly finding ways to unpack this volatile topic and sift through it, not by analyzing or trying to debunk the ideology of every orthodox or heterodox sect of Islam, but by pushing the conversation to the surface, and working to establish communities that embrace Muslim diversity. In my opinion, Muslims living in the United States may have a somewhat better opportunity than others to break real ground on the issue of Muslim sectarianism because in the U.S. Muslim communities are relatively young in comparison to the Muslim world in general. They are still forming, and still developing a domestic identity. Dozens of masajid in the United States at least, are requiring that new imams be thoroughly conversant in English in addition to their birth languages, and to be mentally and emotionally equipped to engage the full spectrum of Muslim diversity in the masajid where they serve. More and more American Muslim leaders are openly acknowledging our challenges with sectarianism and intrareligious bias, and looking for ways to address it responsibly, without intolerance or contentions.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) practiced a simple Islam based upon tawheed (monotheism). He defined many of the principles of non-sectarianism throughout his life as well as during his farewell sermon when he said, "There is no supe-

riority of an Arab over a non-Arab or of a non-Arab over an Arab, except by piety..." He cemented his disdain for sectarian practices when he said, "Do not return after I'm gone to being like unbelievers, some of you striking the necks [fighting] of others."

There is no one way to combat Muslim sectarianism. Confronting it has less to do with polemics, and dissecting ideological arguments for or against every Muslim sect, than it has to do with promoting Muslim unity across racial, ethnic, and ideological lines — despite the human inclination to divisiveness. Striving for unity is not the choice made by everyone. But certainly there are many people who want to be unified, and by all accounts, there are a lot of Muslims, all over the world, who want to be united. At the end of the day, as many Muslims from all races and ethnicities are starting to understand, we are morally mandated to eschew sectarianism: "Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving Clear Signs: For them is a dreadful penalty" (Quran 3:105).

The United States of America is a new frontier for Muslims. Nearly three-quarters of American mosques were established after 1980 which makes most organized Muslim communities less than 40 years old. There is still ample time to address Muslim sectarianism in our country in a sane, intelligent, and rational way, and by the grace of Allah, many Muslims are rising to the occasion. We must create Muslim communities that are equally open and welcoming to everyone— White, Black, Latino, Arab, Pakistani, Indian, Asian, African, low income, high income, educated, and undereducated. Muslims living in the United States, as well as in Canada, are slowly starting to move in that direction. This is the legacy of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh). The conversation about non-sectarian Islam needs to be placed squarely at the forefront of our discourse. It won't be easy, but it is necessary. We're not the only ones taking on this issue. Muslims in other countries are addressing sectarianism in various ways as well. And we're just trying to do our part.

Imam Abu Laith Luqman Ahmad is an Imam of a mosque in Northern California. He is also the CEO of mosquewithoutborders.org. He is the author of the book *Double Edged Slavery*.

Hajj - A Journey of Faith Toward the Ultimate Truth

By Dr. Mohammad Tariqur Rahman



The journey of Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage) begins with niyah (intention), by cleansing the body and, for the man, wearing the ihram, two pieces of cloth without any stitching or decoration on it. A woman wears additional garments in order to cover her awrah (the intimate parts of the body), as prescribed in the Quran. As the journey begins, the pilgrim declares the Talbiyah, the prayer of intention to perform the Hajj and doing so only for the glory of Allah: "Here I am at Your service, O Lord, here I am. Here I am at Your service and You have no partners. Verily all praise and all bounty and the sovereignty are Yours. You have no partners."

The obligatory rituals of Hajj commence on the 9th day of Dhul-Hijjah (the twelfth and final month in the Islamic calendar) by arriving at any point within the boundaries of the plain of Arafah in Makkah Al-Mukarramah (the holy city of Makkah) before sunset. Even if it is only for a moment, standing in Arafah on that day before sunset is the beginning of one's Hajj. The next obliga-

tory part of the journey continues immediately after sunset, the journey towards Muzdalifah, a large level area southeast of Makkah. At least one third of the night needs to be spent under the open sky at Muzdalifah. Then the pilgrim chooses the next part of the journey, either to go to Mina or to the Al-Masjid-al- Haram. Those who choose to go to Mina first will eventually have to go to Al-Masjid-al- Haram and continue the journey by tawaf (circumambulation) seven times around the Ka'ba, the House of Allah and the first masjid on the earth, built by Prophet Ibrahim. Upon completion of tawaf, the pilgrims continue the journey with a ritual named Saii, marching seven times between Safa and Marwa, two mountains near the Ka'ba. Part of the journey includes throwing stones at the jamarat, three pillars where Satan is said to be tied. In addition to these, at least three nights can be spent at Mina and a qurban, sacrifice, can be offered (not obligatory).

In Hajj, each and every ritual is a

reminder of a Muslim's relationship with Allah. The ihram is a reminder of the return to the Rabb (Lord and Creator), as it is similar to the shroud that will be worn after death, for burial in the kubur (grave). Standing on Arafah is a reminder of Allah forgiving Prophet Adam and his wife Hawa, and where mankind began their journey on earth. Saii is the remembrance of the event when Hajar, the second wife of Prophet Ibrahim, accepted to stay in the middle of desert with her baby without any apparent supply of food or shelter, following the command of Allah. Spending a night in the desert of Muzdalifah under the open sky is a reminder of the minuscule existence of a human entity in the universe. Throwing stones at Jamarat is reminder of Prophet Ibrahim's encounter of Satan and throwing stones to get rid of the Satanic influence so that he can obey Allah. The event of qurbani is linked to Prophet Ibrahim's intention to sacrifice his most beloved son for the sake of Allah.

Thus, the journey of Hajj is a reminder

of the concept of tawhid (oneness of Allah) in every dimension. The journey reminds us that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in between, that only Him we worship and obey, and that to Him we all are bound to return. And a pilgrim declares that by reciting the Talbiyah as a testimony of surrender to Him at the beginning of Hajj.

While performing Hajj, a pilgrim has utmost faith that Allah, the most Merciful and the Most Kind, will forgive all his past sins and will grant His blessings for success in the life hereafter. Those who are yet to perform Hajj, also have similar faith about receiving His forgiveness and blessings if they would have the chance to perform Hajj. Hence, while performing the rituals, every pilgrim dedicates their utmost and sincere effort to complete the journey without any mistakes, and an unintentional mistake is corrected by offering various forms of kafarah (expiation).

Faith and Dedication During Hajj Reflected in Daily Life

Is the level of faith and dedication of a pilgrim during Hajj reflected in the daily life of a Muslim? Regardless of the pledge and effort we all make, we are bound to have shortcomings or sins in the ongoing journey of our daily lives. Besides, many of us might not have the opportunity to perform Hajj before we return to our Rabb. Therefore, the faith and dedication that a Muslim demonstrates while performing Hajj, i.e., having the journey to Arafah, Muzdalifah, Mina, Tawaf, Saii, and throwing stones at Jamarat, are meant to be observed every moment in the everyday life.

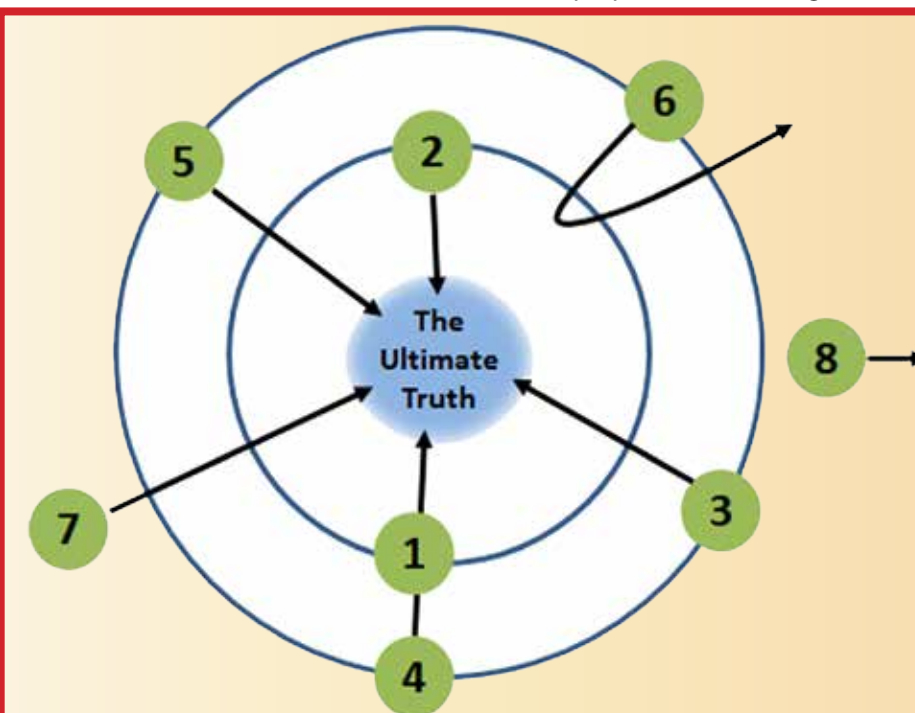
To evaluate our level of faith in our daily life, compared to the level of faith that we have during the Hajj, let us exemplify sai, an important ritual of Hajj. Sai reminds us how Nabi (Prophet) Ibrahim and his second wife Hajar submitted themselves to the command of Allah (Quran, 14: 37). Based on human understanding or rationality, both Nabi Ibrahim and Hajar knew the absurdity of finding water, food, and shelter in the middle of that desert. Such facts, which are based on human calculation — observation or rationality — would force them to believe that the mother and the baby would not survive in the desert. However, their submission

was guided by their faith in the oneness of Allah who creates everything out of nothing and that only He controls everything on earth and in the heavens and everything in between (Quran 39:62). Thus, their obedience to the command of Allah based on their faith in the ultimate truth demonstrates how Allah can contravene natural law, according to His will and pleasure, for He transcends the very laws of nature that He put in place in the universe. The obedience of Ibrahim and Hajar to His command also provides a lesson for all time about the beauty and power found in the depth of faith that a true believer possesses. That is the level of faith we should strive for in our daily lives.

At various times throughout history, Allah sent a prophet and messenger to a particular ummah (nation, race, or tribe).

All the prophets called their respective ummah toward tawhid, oneness of Allah (Quran 51:56). Thus, every prophet called for his people to accept and declare the same testimony of tawhid: "There is no god but Allah." To live life on the right path, mankind has been reminded of the same ultimate truth again and again. A Muslim today must embark on the journey of life towards the ultimate truth. The reality of tawhid, oneness of Allah, is true in every aspect of the universe including human life. The testimony to that reality expresses that Allah is the Creator and sole master of everything in the heavens and earth and everything in between.

Prophet Mohammad, like every other prophet before him, taught his ummah the ultimate truth, that there is no god but Allah. By accepting Mohammad as the last prophet and messenger of Allah,



JOURNEY TOWARD THE ULTIMATE TRUTH

Upon acceptance of the Ultimate Truth, an individual will enter the sanctuary of Islam and continue the journey toward establishing the supreme authority and command of Allah in his or her daily life (individuals shown with the numbers 1-6). Depending on the effort and conviction to obey the command of Allah, some individuals (individuals 1 and 2) will observe nearer proximity to the ultimate truth compared to others (individuals 3-6). With the possibility of obeying different commands of Allah and to varying degrees, diverse individuals might continue their journey following the same (individuals 1 and 4) or different paths (individuals 2, 3, and 5). However, their conviction and effort remain the same, i.e., journey towards establishing the supreme authority and command of Allah in their daily life. It is possible that an individual, once entering the sanctuary of Islam and continuing his journey of Islam, might at a later time turn away from the Ultimate Truth (individual 6). While others, being outside the sanctuary of Islam, might follow the journey of a Muslim (individual 7) or die as non-Muslim (individual 8).

the people of his time accepted the oneness of Allah. Since then, those who have accepted this ultimate truth have been guided in their journey of life on the straight path; and those who denied this truth have remained astray (Quran 48:29). Those who accept the ultimate truth enter the sanctuary of Islam and become Muslim (above figure). Indeed, Allah asks every human being to become a Muslim before they die (Quran 3:102). Upon accepting the ultimate truth, a Muslim starts his journey toward full conviction as a believer (Mu'min), one who not only accepts and declares the ultimate truth but also acts accordingly.

There are more than 80 verses in the Quran that command the Mu'min to lead their life according to the precepts of truth and goodness. In reality, not every Muslim can follow all of Allah's commands in his lifetime. Despite the differences in the paths taken by Muslims for their journey toward the ultimate

truth, everyone must remain determined to follow the command of Allah. At the same time, he or she must aim for excellence in performing their obligations and become a successful Mu'min (Quran 23:1-10). For example, such a successful Mu'min not only establishes salat, but also offers salat with due solemnity and full submissiveness, turns away from al-laghaw (dirty, false, or evil vain talk, falsehood, and all that Allah has forbidden), and guards their chastity.

Conclusion

Hajj is a journey of faith toward the ultimate truth. It has its requirements, its rituals, and its rewards. It also has many important reminders for the believer that can be utilized to deepen iman, strengthen conviction, and imbue the Muslim's devotion with meaning and purpose. Standing on the path toward the ultimate truth, with the faith and dedication of a pilgrim, an individual

takes great care in determining what is right or what is wrong, what is good or bad, useful or useless, beneficial or harmful. Deep in his or her heart is the meaning and purpose of both the shahadah and the talbiyah—that we have full conviction that Allah is one, with no partners, that we are here to serve Him, and that any bounty we enjoy in our lives is from Him, and Him alone. And, finally, in His sovereignty, He alone is worthy of all praise.

Acknowledgement: I gratefully acknowledge invaluable suggestions from Associate Prof. Dr. Raihanah Binti Hj Azahari (Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya), Dr. Mohammad Bahawi (University of Jeddah), and Hatim Abdul-lah Natto (Umm-al-Qura University) in writing this article.

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“For Hajj are the months well known. If anyone undertakes that duty therein, let there be no obscenity or wickedness nor wrangling in the Hajj. And whatever good you do—Allah knows it. And take a provision for the journey, but, indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding” (Al-Baqarah:197).

Hajj is full of many important messages but perhaps one of the most important messages of Hajj is “prepare for the hereafter!” Hajj begins with the pilgrims entering the state of ihram in which they are prohibited from having sexual relations, marrying, wearing perfume, and other worldly pleasures. Hence, from the time the pilgrims begin Hajj, they are directed to minimize the distraction of their worldly concerns and focus intensely on preparing for the hereafter.

Additionally, the standing on Arafah during Hajj reminds the pilgrims to prepare for the day when all of mankind

will have to stand before Allah to be judged. The two pieces of white cloth worn by the male pilgrims remind them to prepare for the day when they will be shrouded in similar clothing after their inevitable demise. The timing of the Hajj reminds the pilgrims of the importance of preparing for the hereafter. The Hajj begins at a time of a heightened awareness of preparation. The Hajj takes place in the last month of the Islamic calendar and, naturally, as the year draws to a close, one instinctively begins preparing for the coming year and evaluating the previous years.

During the performance of the rites of Hajj, the pilgrims are directed to reflect upon the obedience and submission (the core meaning of Islam) of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and his family. This signals to the pilgrims that proper preparation for the hereafter is simply done by obeying Allah and adhering to Islam. Those who frequently think

about preparation for the hereafter are blessed with swift repentance, satisfaction with Allah's provisions, and active worship. Alternatively, those who don't think about preparation are often at risk of delaying their repentance, dissatisfaction with Allah's provisions, and laziness in worship.

Unquestionably, preparing for the hereafter should be a believer's greatest concern in life. Hence, the last pillar of Islam stresses preparation for it. Furthermore, the last verse of the Quran, the last message for mankind, according to Ibn Abbas (or one of the last verses according to others) tells us to be prepared for the hereafter. Allah says, “And be aware of the day when you shall return to Allah. Then every person shall be compensated for what they earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly” (Al-Baqarah:281).

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Rohingya Muslims' Right of Self-Determination and the Responsibility of the Ummah

By Dr. Firoz Mahboob Kamal

The massive campaign of ethnic cleansing currently taking place in Myanmar provides little option for the Rohingya Muslims. Former Muslim majority state of Arakan, now called Rakhine, is being rapidly transformed to a Muslim-free zone. The current regime in Myanmar has proven that they offer no peace or security for the Rohingya Muslims. The head of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, Zeid bin Ra'ad, has described the ongoing killing, rape, and eviction as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” Tirana Hassan, Amnesty International's crisis response director, has stated, “The evidence is irrefutable—the Myanmar security forces are setting northern Rakhine State ablaze in a targeted campaign to push the Rohingya people out of Myanmar. Make no mistake: this is ethnic cleansing.” She continued, “There is a clear and systematic pattern of abuse here. Security forces surround a village, shoot people fleeing in panic and then torch houses to the ground. In legal terms, these are crimes against humanity—systematic attacks and forcible deportation of civilians.”

Sadly, as history shows, those who engage in persecution and brutality do not respond to moral and humanitarian

appeals to conscience. Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's State Counsellor (a position similar to prime minister) has proved totally impervious to such appeal. Even calls upon Myanmar to stop the carnage by Nobel laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Professor Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama of Tibet, and many others, have made little impact.

Now it is very clear that relief goods, shelter, sympathy, and/or prayer are necessary; but that is not enough to solve the problems of the Rohingya Muslims. The Palestinian people were given shelter in neighboring countries following their expulsion from Palestine. And they have received relief goods for more than 70 years. But that didn't end the Israeli occupation. They still suffer the curse of an occupied people. All victims of persecution or occupation must be given full opportunity to exercise the fundamental right of self-determination. Failure of a peaceful solution only pushes persecuted people to take up arms to try and liberate themselves. In fact, the Rohingya Muslims are being pushed to that desperate response.

The ongoing killing and eviction of

the Rohingya Muslims didn't start in 2017. Myanmar authorities claim that the Rohingya Muslims came to Rakhine in 1971. But as early as 1947, Rohingya leaders requested Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Pakistani independence movement, to incorporate the state of Arakan into the newly forming nation of Pakistan. The danger of living under the authority of the Burmese supremacists was not unknown to the Rohingya Muslims even before the creation of independent Burma. This historical fact demonstrates that Muslims were living in Rakhine in 1947.

In 1977, the ruling military junta declared Rohingya Muslims as a defense and security threat to Burma, as part of Operation Nagamin which aimed to rid the population of “foreigners.” More than 200,000 people fled to Bangladesh as a result of human rights abuses by the military. Then, a year later, Bangladesh and Burma reached an agreement, brokered by the U.N., which repatriated a majority of Rohingya. It was a secret agreement at the time, but when it was disclosed, it showed that Burma recognized the legal residence of the Rohingya. But the persecution continued and in 1982, the government introduced a new immi-



The brutal, murderous forces in Myanmar are showing their corrupted humanity in their actions against the innocent Rohingya Muslims. They are destroying their homes and villages. Mosques are being burnt to ashes. They are destroying the chastity of women and the innocence of children. The Myanmar forces could only dare to commit such crimes because they see that none is there to challenge them

gration law that declared people who had migrated to Burma during British colonial rule as illegal immigrants and they included the Rohingya as part of this designation. At the same time, the Rohingya Muslims were put under restrictions on travel, education, jobs, health care, and marriage; and a two-child limit per family was instituted in 2013. Roughly 120,000 Muslims were evicted in 2011 and 2012. In September of this year around 400,000 fled Myanmar into Bangladesh. The centuries-old Rohingya Muslim state of Arakan is being emptied of Muslims.

The Quranic Call

The Quranic call to help those who are oppressed is obligatory on every Muslim. The call comes in the following verse: "And what is the matter with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and for the oppressed people among men, women, and the children who say, 'Our Lord, take us out of the city of the oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?'" (Quran 4:75). The call of Allah (SWT), however, as revealed in the above verse, is falling on the deaf ears of 1.6 billion Muslims around the world. The suffering and sorrow of the Muslim men, women, and children of Arakan bring no helpers from the Muslim World. The Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC) is known for remaining silent or taking no action when needed. Myanmar is part of ASEAN bloc, of which 42 percent are Muslim. But the organization does nothing to help the Rohingya. The failure of the U.N. to stand for justice and end persecutions, whether in Palestine, Kashmir, or Myanmar, is demonstrated again and again. Such incompetence of the world bodies, especially the cowardly inaction of Muslims, has emboldened the Burmese supremacists to take the quickest, most brutal route to ethni-

cally cleanse the Rohingya people from their homeland. It has also increased the concern of the Bangladesh government that the evicted Rohingya Muslims will never be given any chance to return to Myanmar. The stay of several hundred thousand Rohingya Muslims in refugee camps in Bangladesh for more than 30 years makes their apprehension understandable.

Cutting Through the Lies

The U.N. Human Right Commission has described the Rohingya Muslims as the "most persecuted minority" in the world. Yet, the Nobel laureate and de-facto leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, has proven her unwillingness to end the brutal persecution. She blames "Muslim extremists" for all the problems in Rakhine. Thus, she creates a rationale to justify the army's genocidal cleansing as an appropriate response. She conveniently ignores the truth that the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army that killed 12 police officers the end of August first came to the fore in 2016 when it attacked police outposts, killing nine officers. Maung Zarni, an adviser to the European Center for the Study of Extremism, says that the group's actions result from the military's "systematic abuses of genocidal proportions." He notes, "This is not a terrorist group aimed at striking at the heart of Myanmar society as the government claims it is. They're a group of hopeless men who decided to form some kind of self-defense group and protect their people who are living in conditions akin to a Nazi concentration camp." The Rohingya Muslims didn't take the route of armed insurgency until recently. The peaceful approach produced nothing but death, rape, and eviction.

On September 7, Aung San Suu Kyi ended her silence, saying in a press

conference that whatever is happening in the Rakhine state has a long history with roots in the colonial past. She argued that the Myanmar government can't solve such a complex problem easily or quickly. But one should question whether the government has, or ever had, any intention to solve the problem. In fact, the problem was created when the government denied citizenship to the Rohingya people who trace their heritage back to the Muslim communities in Arakan of the 9th century. This is not complex, but rather very simple. As a part of the same ongoing obfuscations, Aung San Suu Kyi blames the international community for stoking the fires of conflict by voicing support for the Rohingya. Yet, she has not allowed independent journalists to enter the Rakhine state to report what is actually taking place.

Behind the Scenes in Rakhine

Although Rakhine is the poorest state of Myanmar, its geopolitical and economic importance is significant. The coastline of this fertile land is longer than that of Bangladesh. In 2004, a huge deposit of oil and gas was discovered in the seabed off the coast. China and other countries have already been involved in exploration. Rakhine has miles of beachfront that offers tourism opportunities. The government of Myanmar wants to exploit Rakhine's economic and strategic potentials for its national interest. The Indian government also casts its greedy eyes on Rakhine; they want to build a seaport there to connect its land-locked eastern provinces. But the ethnic and religious identity of the area poses an obstacle against such a strategic goal. Both India and the supremacist regime of Myanmar can't tolerate a Muslim majority population in Rakhine. They consider such a population a threat to their economic interests and investments.

Arakan: A Divine Trial

Now is the time for those who have real concern for the victims of the horrific atrocities in Myanmar to show their moral courage and solidarity with the oppressed. Otherwise, the regime will fulfil their genocidal objective. Inaction in the face of ethnic cleansing is indeed

an act of collaboration in the crime. Human rights and moral values only survive if people show their courage to stand for justice.

A believer's iman is truly tested in these instances. In Islam, standing for the truth and fighting for the oppressed is indeed a great ibadah. In fact, the greatest ibadah in Islam is not done in any mosque or on a prayer mat. It takes place in the battle against corruption, exploitation, injustice, and persecution. Allah (SWT) selects His best heroes from this battle, a battle which indeed decides the destiny of the Muslim ummah. In the absence of such heroes, humanity, morality, Divine truth, and the rule of law perish from the surface of the earth, as criminals and corrupters tyrannize people everywhere. Standing against the evil forces is indeed standing for Allah (SWT) and His revealed Truth. And such standing for Him is so crucial that it is obligatory on every Muslim. It is revealed in the holy Quran: "[Muhammad] Say [to the people], 'I advise you only one thing, that you stand for Allah in pairs or alone'" (Quran 34:46). This command played such a pivotal role in the early Muslims' lives that more than seventy percent of the companions were martyred in their fight against the Quraish persecutors. As per the above verse, if one fails to find a partner in the fight against persecution, he should stand alone.

The brutal, murderous forces in Myanmar are showing their corrupted humanity in their actions against the innocent Rohingya Muslims. They are destroying their homes and villages. Mosques are being burnt to ashes. They are destroying the chastity of women and the innocence of children. The Myanmar forces could only dare to commit such crimes because they see that none is there to challenge them. It is a failure as well as a shame for the whole of mankind. But what is the role of the people who believe in Allah (SWT)? Believing in Him means standing for Him. But where are the Muslims willing to play that role against such evil? Such a role indeed defines a man — whether he is a part of the evil or one who stands up against the persecution and injustice. That indeed also decides one's success or failure in the hereafter.

Dr. Firoz Mahboob Kamal is a medical doctor, having studied in the U.S. and UK. He researches and writes on many social sciences issues.



HHRD's Emergency Response Team (ERT) of Br. Mamun and Br. Mubarak are on location in Cox Bazar Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Refugees have sought safety from the violence in Myanmar. Consisting mainly of women and children these makeshift camps have become a center of disease and infection due to lack of hygienic conditions. Our ERT has reported a total of 640,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh with 429,000 having arrived since the new wave of violence this past month.



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