National Campaign by ICNA Council for Social Justice

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN
STOP SCHOOL BULLYING

School Bullying is a National Crisis

64% of bullied children do not report it

1 out of 3 children in public schools are bullied

Highest increase of suicides in children 10-14 years old

90% of cyberbullying victims also physically bullied

42% of Muslim children report being bullied in public school

ICNA COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
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November - December 2017

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: guilty 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

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 young 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 landowner 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 invisible 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, miltated 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. Fear ofreprisal and the most common reason why children refuse to tell others that they have been bullied. Alarmingly, school bullying has become 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. Cyberbullying 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, in civility, and bigotry being normalized and even trivialized. Among all public-school students in America today, Muslim children have the highest rates of bullying, as they are the most common reason why children refuse to tell others that they have been bullied. Alarmingly, school bullying has become 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.

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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 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 376 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, filled 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 African-Americans to the state legislature, took over Wilmington and killed at least 60 African-Americans. Black leaders were killed “for their own safety” and then evicted from the town. Professor of law, Robert Bogus, has written about the militia clause, could never have imagined a possible Black insurrection from purchasing guns under the Second Amendment that provides the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. The need for debate and action on gun control, and even the Second Amendment, is urgent. It is important that we change the militia clause, could never have imagined a possible Black insurrection from purchasing guns.

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. Fearing marginalization 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 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 militia clause, could never have imagined a possible Black insurrection from purchasing guns under the Second Amendment that provides the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

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 provides emergency cash assistance to 52,000 families in 46 distribution centers in New Jersey and Florida to collect relief items such as food, survival kits, blankets, etc.

On October 1, the ICNA Relief Disaster Team, consisting of Imam Yusuf Rios and Muslim Chaplains WiliMedroo Ruiz of Islamic Center of Puerto Rico Montehestra, and Abdul Rauf Khan, Assistant Executive Director of ICNA Relief, headed to Puerto Rico to assess the situation. Bringng 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.

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 festiva".

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. "I'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."
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 Stafford, 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.”

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’.”

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.

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 other 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.”

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 Hanzah 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.
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 at 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 Rohingyas” says Oussama Jammal, USCMO Secretary General. “We focused on common ground to establish channels for American Muslims to help the Rohingyas survive the catastrophe they face now and to undo the insurmountable 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 Rohingyas more 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 (CJSJ), 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 Rohingyas one of the most persecuted people in the world. The protest began with a Khutba given by Br. Naeem Baig of ICNA and the ummah prayer. While the military wields the real power in Myanmar, many have criticized Aung Suu Kyi, officially titled State Counselor, for not doing more to stop the atrocities against the Rohingyas.

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.

Trump Administration Sued Over DACA

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 transport business. The team was comprised of student Gia Farooqi, Hasan Usmani and Monaeb Mian, both newly graduated, and alumna Hanah Lakhan. Hasan Usmani attended and graduated from Noorul Iman Islamic School in South Brunswick, New Jersey. The proposed startup, Rishi Rides, would employ existing rickshaw drivers, use pre-loaded transaction cards, and encourage ride-sharing.

The team won 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.

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 Yaseen Qadri will join 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 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://cnatexas.org/.

Registration is open for the 11th Annual ICNA-MAS South-Central Convention 2017. 

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

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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://cnatexas.org/.
Exhibition Opens in Brussels: ‘Islam, it’s also our History!’

The exhibition, “Islam, it’s also our History”, opened on September 15 and runs to January 2018 at the Vanderborght Museum in Brussels. 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 exhibition 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 rival 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 comprising 92 percent. 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 does 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.

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 Comedian by the Charleston City Paper. The events also featured Fatoum Mamut 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.

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 to someone named Sattar Ali, not James or Robert.” Once the police verified the check, the family was released.

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 dash-cam 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 rammmed 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.

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” but 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.”

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Fares lives in Missouri and Arshia Hussain Islamophobia. The interviews are part of lives in the U.S. and how they cope with Kuruvilla, writes about her conversation content may be. “

“We respect the constitutional right to down, the university itself removed only 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. Salsabil 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.”

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, Eraser Moor, 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.

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 Bonnias 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 Betty Shabazz, the widow of El Haji 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 Haji 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 Vancou- ver 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: Christian 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 a Center, 3940 Broadway, New York, NY 10032, Thursday, October 26, 2017, at 6:30 PM.

The Message Forum plans to present thought-provoking, inclusive information using various formats including panel discussions, workshops, 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.
Women from across the nation attended ICNA Sisters’ first ever American Muslim Women’s Conference held in Virginia.

By Javenia Salman

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

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. This 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 and platforms the women at the conference were a part of, it was their responsibility to stand united as one. “She added that it was more important than ever before for us to stand united as one.” She added that it was more important than ever before for us to stand united as one.

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The conference aimed to unite women leaders 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 Abudgeidehi, Nahela Morales and Zahr Billoo and “Through the Filters: Myth vs Reality” with Alia Salem, Hena Bukhari and Mariya Bangoe 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 the 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.”

Javenia Salman is an active member of Young Muslims and ICNA Sisters Wing.
Introduction
This hadith contains the rulings concerning the tongue and the behavior of Muslims towards others. It also emphasizes that we are responsible for whatever we say. Al-Haythami points out that this hadith 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 hadith 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 uttering a word displeasing to Allah without considering it of any significance for which Allah exalts his rank (in Jannah); another one speaks a word displeasing to Allah while 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 committed 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 nasihah. 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, if we speak in a manner that is simple and easy to understand, our advice will be positive and strong.

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, 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 better that we exercise silence. We should also try to practice mu'āshah, 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 nasihah, we should ensure that confidentiality is maintained to minimize other problems from occurring.

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In fact, such conversations can lead us into an area where we can say something disrespectful to Allah (SWT). In another hadith, in Hadith 29, the Prophet (pbuh) gave Muslid (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 create anxiety. 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 helpful, 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 Sahih Muslim. It says: “a travelling visitor who has come to stay with you for a short while.” In another hadith, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “Show respect to your neighbors who annoy and disturb him, but he bears it with patience and forbearance until it ends the matter either by his death lifetime or upon the death of either of them” (Mustad Ahmad, sahih as per Al-Sheikh al-Albani). 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) said: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his guest.” A special gift [or present] to the guest [or the guest] is to be entertained for three days. Whatever is beyond that is an act of sadness. It is not lawful for a guest to stay with his host to the extent that he makes things difficult for him (for the host)” (Sahih-al-Bukhari; also narrated in Muslim). Another hadith records the Prophet (pbuh) empathetically stating that one does not have to complete imran if his neighbor is not safe from his manners.

Regarding its ruling extrapolated from this hadith, the majority of scholars are of the opinion that hosting is not wajib. Even though it is a great and noble act, it is considered good manners, but not a recommended act. According to many scholars, the recommended act of hosting does not extend to evildoers or here- tics. This is because there is potential harm to the social fabric of the 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, nisāhah). Nonetheless, we should be very cautious when hosting such people as 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 manners to our neigh- bors and guests. Compared to Hadith 14 (about the sacredness of life, chas- tity, and purity) in Sahih Muslim, this hadith is more focused on the relationships around the house and the treatment of the family or community circle, rather than the social hierarchy. This hadith is brought up, head turns blazing, as if to say “Shall! There is no need to talk about that… Muslims don’t do that! Yes, it is considered taboo, but the very fact that we don’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 boundaries. Furthermore, even if parents do talk to their children about this, it 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.

Vicimized 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 in a broader sense (considering the abuser not to be a stranger), these numbers increase. 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 in a broader sense (considering the abuser not to be a stranger), these numbers increase. 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 to the child are obvious and may be insurmountable.

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 upended, maybe being 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 school, and massads 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 organ- izing or supporting workshops and events on this topic. The community can invite Muslim mental health professional- es 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 espe- cially if against our extended family and defense of our children. We must be silent no more.

Stop Ignoring the Issue of Sexual Abuse

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.
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 — predominately 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 Donald Trump.

“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 parents and the only way these issues can be resolved is if we start talking about them. I too often see, as a teacher and someone who deals with students is forcing schools to change and 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-
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)
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.

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 he experienced 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 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 playground. 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 him understand what some 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 teaching of sharing and forgiving others, cursing or spreading rumors, names, or talking badly about other people. You can read with your child Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 11, and discuss the meaning on the 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 with [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 persistent in your efforts to help your child. Do everything in your capacity and then leave the rest up to Allah SWT.

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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 community for this issue.

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 (Centers 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 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).

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: http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp
Bullying is physical, emotional, or social harassment, intimidation, or aggression that makes one feel 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 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 seemingly harmless 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 involv bullying or lead to bullying in the future. Students should also be observant and report possible cases of bullying immediately.

ICNA’S CSJ NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

STOP BULLYING OUR (MUSLIM) CHILDREN

By Hamza Ansari

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.
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 are least 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 to a bully for psychological 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, name-calling, or physically intimidating or harming them. A healthy relationship 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.

Hamza Ansari is an intern with ICNA Council for Social Justice.

Resources:
www.thebullyproject.com
www.stopbullying.gov
https://www.youtube.com/user/StopBullyingGov
National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

BULLYING, EMPATHY, AND REFLECTING UPON OURSELVES

By Um Abdu-Rahman

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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 that is state of alert, the regulation of impulsive behavior, helping see the future consequences of one’s actions rather than seeking immediate rewards. Not surprisingly, those who cause 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 help patients. For instance, it has an inhibitory projection to the amygdala, a subcortical structure associated with violent behavior.

In a school in the U.K., the students were taught the practice of slowing down, breathing deeply, and staying focused and calm. The more time a student gained experience that might trigger stress or negative emotion and the child’s reaction to that experience. This helps other parts of the brain, and the prefrontal cortex, to manage the response. The children who bullied others from his class, were interviewed. Those who did not so easily slide into frantic, heightened state of alert, of feeling existence or the distress they are experiencing is the foundation for the empathizing with another person. The child relationship. In fact, if parents do not model empathy for their children, the child will not be able to help that person.

Empathy in Its Full 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 parents, in doing their parental duty, must empathize with their child and know how their child is feeling. Empathy is an important aspect of emotional intelligence and is essential to build a child’s ability to understand and satisfying relationships. Understanding and caring about another person’s emotional states and experiences is the foundation for the desire to extend kindness, to inspire, and to influence others in a healthy way; and to help others. The conversely, parents who lack empathy, they just choose to use their ability to identify with and understand another person’s thoughts or feelings in a directive 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 understand the other person’s thoughts and to understand their point of view. Narcissists and sociopaths have this type of empathy. In fact, they use this empathy in a manipulative way to control their victim, which buttons to push, how to best manipulate or control. Then there are those who have a capacity for empathy but unable to regulate their behavior to control the other. More egalitarian relationship dynamics do exist when both parties are associated with children. The children and their parents give insights to the means by which it has an inhibitory projection to the amygdala, a subcortical structure associated with violent behavior.

To Bully or to Empathize— or Both

We might wonder how an adult can act in a mean, threatening way with his or her own child. Do they not see the harm they are doing? The answer clearly is no, and the reason is that the bullying parent has a false sense of superiority to justify the bullying in being treated in such an insensitive and harsh way? Where is the parent’s empathy? It’s interesting that some studies support the idea that parents who do not model empathy for their children, the child will not be able to help that person.

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! 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!
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 intra-religious killing amongst Muslims around the globe. So just what is Muslim sectarianism, and how is sectarianism viewed by the Shariah?

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 nuances, and some are very simple. Some sects require initiation, and some don’t. Some groups are descriptive in their doctrine but not necessarily 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 denote 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 [Hudn] 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, 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 remem-ber 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 3:110). Muslim leaders of the Prophet peace be upon him) frequently supporting sectarianism in our religion, and, as a deterrent to sectarianism, the Prophet warned the people from engaging about religious 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 this. 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 other Muslims in the 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 deal with the full spectrum of Muslim diversity in the masjid where they serve. More and more American Muslim leaders are openly acknowledging our challenges with sectarianism and intra-religious bias, and looking for ways to address it responsibly, without intolerance or contempt.

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 superiority 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 and denouncing 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 disputes 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 starting to take 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 recognize the full spectrum of Muslim diversity in the masjid where they serve. More and more American Muslim leaders are openly acknowledging our challenges with sectarianism and intra-religious bias, and looking for ways to address it responsibly, without intolerance or contempt.

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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 Talibiyah, 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 I 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 holy city of Makkah (the holy city of Makkah) before sunset. Even if it is only for a moment, standing in al-Haram and continue the journey by al-Masjid-al-Haram and throwing stones at Jamarat, are important rituals of Hajj. Saii reminds us how Nabi (Prophet) Ibrahim and his second wife Hājar to His command also accepted the command of Allah. A pilgrim declaring that by reciting the Talbiyah as a testimony of faith 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).

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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 holy city of Makkah (the holy city of Makkah) before sunset. Even if it is only for a moment, standing in al-Haram and continue the journey by al-Masjid-al-Haram and throwing stones at Jamarat, are important rituals of Hajj. Saii reminds us how Nabi (Prophet) Ibrahim and his second wife Hājar to His command also accepted the command of Allah. A pilgrim declaring that by reciting the Talbiyah as a testimony of faith 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).

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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 deny this truth have remained astray (Quran 48:29). Those who accept the ultimate truth hasten to become Muslim before they die (Quran 3:102).

Upon accepting the truth that Allah is the only God, 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 he also repeats the tawaf and hajj, and has full submissiveness, turns away from al-laghw (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 talibiyah—that we have full conviction that Allah is one, with no partners, that we fear Him and respect 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.

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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.

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 children who say, ‘Our Lord, take us out of the city of the oppressive and the children who say, ‘Our Lord, 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 corruptors tyrannize people everywhere. Standing against the evil forces is indeed standing for Allah (SWT) and His revealed Truth. Such a role indeed defines a man — whether he is a part of the Muslims willing to play that role. But one should question whether the people who stand for the Muslims who are living in conditions of persecution and injustice. That indeed also decides one's success or failure in life. Apart from self a helper?'” (Quran 4:75). The call of Allah (SWT), however, as revealed in the above verse, is falling on the deaf ears. 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.

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 challenge to Rakhine either to protect or appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Your- self a helper?” (Quran 4:75). The call of Allah (SWT), however, as revealed in the above verse, is falling on the deaf ears. 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.

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 the exploitation. Rakhine has miles of beach-front that offers tourism opportunities. The government of Myanmar wants to exploit Rakhine’s economic and strategic potential. But one should question whether the people who stand for the Muslims who are living in conditions of persecution and injustice. That indeed also decides one's success or failure in life. Apart from self a helper?” (Quran 4:75). The call of Allah (SWT), however, as revealed in the above verse, is falling on the deaf ears. 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.

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 fulfill 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 corruptors tyrannize people everywhere. Standing against the evil forces is indeed standing for Allah (SWT) and His revealed Truth. Such a role indeed defines a man — whether he is a part of the Muslims willing to play that role. But one should question whether the people who stand for the Muslims who are living in conditions of persecution and injustice. That indeed also decides one's success or failure in the hereafter.

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