

Human rights in Islam

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By Sidrah Unis

Human rights

Friday feature

ISLAM is an all-encompassing religion that focuses upon both the spiritual and practical aspects of life. It promotes a lifestyle of religious devotion, simplicity, sacrifice, unity, and brotherhood, which is of benefit to an individual not only in this world, but also in the hereafter.

It is an established principle that the right of one is the duty of another, and vice versa. Islam not only lays down duties owed to God, but it also defines duties owed to individuals. Muslim jurists have classified rights into: rights of God; and rights of men.

The rights of God are the religious acts of devotion and faith, which we owe to God Almighty. For example, the offering of *namaz*, performance of Haj, etc. The rights of men are those that individuals enjoy against each other. These are also referred to as human rights. This article only aims at explaining the concept of human rights in Islam.

It is, unfortunately, believed in the West that the values and ideals prescribed by Islam are contrary to the norms of human rights. This wrong concept has taken root not only due to the West's ignorance of the Quran and the Traditions, but also due to the irresponsible, at times even outrageous, attitude of some Muslims. In fact, Islam recognized and enforced the principles of human rights centuries before their acknowledgment by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

History reveals that Islam's role with reference to the introduction and enforcement of human rights is that of a pioneer. An in-depth study of ancient civilizations shows that although vast efforts were made to promote studies in the arts and sciences, in most cases, there was no consistent development or the promotion of human rights. It was in the 16th and 17th centuries that the masses in the West were made aware of fundamental rights and civil liberties by their political thinkers and jurists. When the subjects demanded these rights to be granted and acknowledged, the rulers stubbornly refused. This resulted in the subjects engaging in a bitter tussles with them.

Islam, on the other hand, took a different course by granting these rights from its very advent. In fact, it is mandatory on every Muslim ruler to enforce these rights in accordance with the provisions of Islam. And for the one who fails to do so, the Quran clearly says: "...And whoever judges not by what Allah has revealed, those are the disbelievers." (The Quran, 5:44). "...And whoever judges not by what Allah has revealed, those are the transgressors." (The Quran, 5:47).

Some of the human rights ordained by the Quran and the traditions are:

1. Right to life: "...Whoever kills a person, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief

in the land, it is as though he had killed all humanity..." (The Quran, 5:32) "...And kill not the soul which Allah has made sacred except in the course of justice..." (The Quran, 6:152). "And kill not the soul which Allah has forbidden except for a just cause..." (The Quran, 17:33).

2. Right to equality: The Prophet (PBUH), in his farewell sermon, declared: "Righteous actions are the only mark of distinction, and not wealth, birth, or status in life." Similarly, it is given in the Quran: "O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the noblest of you with Allah is the (one who is

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the) most righteous of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware." (The Quran, 49: 13).

3. Right to respect and reputation: "And those who malign believing men and believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin." (The Quran, 33: 58). "O you who believe, let not a folk deride a folk, perchance they may be better than they (are); nor let women (deride) women, perchance they may be better than they (are); neither defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. Bad is the name of lewdness after faith... Neither backbite one another..." (The Quran, 49: 11, 12).

4. Right to privacy: "O you who believe, enter not houses other than your own houses, until you have asked permission... This is better for you that you may be mindful." (The Quran, 24: 27) "O you who believe, avoid most of suspicion... and spy not..." (The Quran, 49: 12).

5. Right To justice: "O you who believe, be maintainers of justice..." (The Quran, 4: 135) "O you who believe... let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just: that is nearer to observance of duty..." (The Quran, 5: 8) "...And if thou judge, judge between them with equity. Surely Allah loves the equitable." (5:42) "Say: My Lord enjoins justice..." (The Quran, 7: 29).

6. Right to freedom of religion: "There is no compulsion in religion..." (The Quran,

2:256). "And say: the truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve..." (The Quran, 18: 29). "Say (O Prophet): O disbelievers, I serve not that which you serve, nor do you serve whom I worship... Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion. (The Quran, 109: 1-6).

7. Right to education: A tradition of the Prophet that describes the significance of education is reported by Ibn Majah in the following manner: "Anas reported that the Messenger of Allah said, 'Search for knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim man and woman.'"

8. Right to protest against injustice and oppression: Citizens of the Islamic state have the right to resist and protest against injustice, tyranny, and oppression. There are several traditions of the Prophet in this regard: "Abu Sayeed reported that the Messenger of Allah said, 'The best jihad is that of one who says a true word before a tyrant.'"

Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, on assuming the office, declared: "Cooperate with me when I am right, but correct me when I commit error; obey me so long as I follow the commandments of Allah and His Prophet, but turn away from me when I deviate."

9. Right to earn: "...For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn..." (The Quran, 4:32). The right to earn also means the right to get a job if a person has no employment. It is the responsibility of the Islamic state to provide

employment to the citizens if they have none. The following tradition of the Prophet, reported by Abu Daud, elaborates this:

"Anas reported that a man came to the Messenger of Allah and requested alms. The Prophet said, 'Have you got anything in your house?' He replied, 'Yes, I have a woollen carpet... and a cup...' The Prophet said, 'Come to me with both these things.' The man did so. The Prophet took them and asked the people around him, 'Who will buy these two?' ...A man said, 'I will take them both for two silver coins.'

The Prophet gave the things to that man and took the coins. He then turned to the man, who had come for help, gave him the coins, and said, 'Buy food for your family with one of them and buy an axe with the other, then come to me with the axe.' The man did so. The Prophet fixed a handle to it and said, 'Go, cut wood and sell it. Come to me after fifteen days.' When the man came to the Prophet after the prescribed time, he had earned ten silver coins... The Messenger of Allah said to him, 'This is better for you...'

The above-mentioned are some of the numerous rights provided to people under Islamic law. It must have been noticed that the expression of Islam, while recognizing and protecting the basic rights of a human being, is quite different from that of the western legal systems.