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Traditions of Tolerance In Islam

My dear brothers and sisters, Assalamu Aleikum wa rahmatu allah wa barakatuh, may his peace blessings and mercy be upon all of you; and thanks for waiting patiently to listen to me.

Today we call to mind the atrocities which engulfed us all in London in 2005 when many innocent lives were lost and many more were injured. Our hearts go out to all the victims and their families. We pray to God to give them patience and shower his mercy on all of them.

No one who terrorises people has any right to claim that he is a religious person, whether he is a Muslim or a Christian or a Jew. The prophet Mohammed peace be upon him (pbuh) said: "Anyone who terrorises people is not amongst my followers" [reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

He also said that: "No Muslim should be given..refuge by any Muslim". In Islam it is a crime to glorify or condone terrorist murder. Or even to suggest that suicide bombers are anything but martyrs. They are but killers waging war against God and his messengers. The true martyrs are the innocent people they killed.

Islam defines terrorism as an act of war waged against God and his messengers by openly committing disorders on the earth. Any act of terrorism is severely punishable in Islam as stated in verses 33 and 34 in chapter five.

Listen very carefully please to the punishment. And I wish if the British Government would apply this punishment regarding those who have been captured.

The punishment of those who wage war against God and his messenger and strive with might and maim with mischief through the land is execution or crucifixion or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides or being exiled from the land. That is their disgrace in the world and the heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter, except for those who repent before they fall into your power.

In that case, know that God is oft-forgiving, most merciful.

For the double crime of treason against the State, combined with treason against God, as shown by overt crimes, four alternative crimes are mentioned, any one of which is mentioned to be applied according to the crime committed.

Of course, no one can wage war against God, as he is exalted in mind, the irresistible. But this emphasises that terrorism is a crime not just against humanity, but also against God himself, and the teachings of all his messengers. That is why Islam regards the killing of one innocent soul as equivalent to the killing of all mankind, and the saving of one life as the equivalent to the saving of the whole of humanity. Verse 32, chapter 5 illustrates this.

If anyone slew a person, unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he slew the whole people. And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.

We are gathered here today to celebrate Tolerance International. According to the Oxford Dictionary, there are two meanings for the word 'tolerance'. The first meaning is, the ability, willingness or capacity to tolerate something. And the second meaning is, an allowable amount of variation of specified quantity, especially in the dimensions of the machine or part. This is known as 'engineering tolerance'.

When I used to design aeroplanes forty years ago, the tolerance was so small (plus or minus 0.1mm). Later in life, when I started to design columns and beams, the tolerance increased. "God's creation is perfect, because he is perfect, therefore his word does not permit any engineering deviation", as stated in verses 3 and 4, chapter 67.

But because man is not perfect, God demands from us to practice religious tolerance. So let me give you a few examples from the Qura'n regarding religious tolerance. The first verse which comes to my mind is verse 256, chapter 2:

"La Ikraha fe Din, Qad tabayana al-rushdu min al-ghayb".

No compulsion in religion, what is right is clear from what is wrong. Compulsion is incompatible with religion, because:

Number one: religion depends upon faith and will and these would be meaningless if induced by force.

Secondly, truth and error have been so clearly shown up by the mercy of God that there should be no doubt in the minds of any persons of good will as to the fundamentals of faith.

Thirdly, God's protection is continuous, and his plan is always to lead us from the depths of darkness into the clearest light.

In chapter 10, verse 99, God is saying to prophet Mohammed:

"If it had been your Lord's will they would all have believed; all who are on earth. Will you then Mohammed compel mankind against their will to believe?"

If it had been God's plan or will not to grant the limited free will that he has granted to man, his power would have made all mankind alike. All would then have had faith. But that faith would have reflected no merit on them. In the actual world as it is, man has been endowed with various faculties and capacities so that he should strive and explore, and bring himself into harmony with Allah's will. Hence, faith becomes a moral achievement, and to resist faith becomes a sin".

As a complimentary proposition, men of faith must not be impatient or angry if they have to contend against unfaith; and most important of all, they must guard against the temptation of forcing faith, because imposing it on others by physical compulsion or any other forms of compulsion such as social pressure or inducements held out by wealth or position will not make it a true faith. Forced faith is no faith. They should strike spiritually and let God's plan work.

In chapter 109, God clearly states: "You have your religion, I have my religion: Lakum dinukum, wa liya Din".

I cannot force my faith on any of you and you cannot force your faith on me.

However, we continue to live together as brothers and sisters in humanity because God says:

"Oh mankind I have created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into Nations and tried you get to know each other; to care for each other, to love each other, not to despise each other. Surely the most honoured among you in the sight God is the righteous. Not the white, not the black, not the yellow, not the red; the one who really fears God".

Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and the beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious, for your Lord knows best who have strayed from his path, and who received guidance. In this wonderful passage are laid down principles of religious teaching which are good for all time. But where are the teachers

with such qualifications; that's what we suffer from today. We have no Imams or teachers who can teach the new generation, the children. We must invite all to the way of God, and expound his universal will. We must do it with wisdom and discretion. Meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustrations from their own knowledge and experience which may be very narrow or very wide. Our preaching must be not dogmatic, self-regarding, not offensive but gentle, considerate and such as would attract their attention. Our manner and our arguments should not be acrimonious but modelled on the most courteous and the most gracious example.

Let me finish by saying, Islam is a religion of peace, justice, mercy and tolerance. It is a divine way that controls all aspects of life including rules governing war and peace. Islam teaches the best values and most morals. The fault lies with man, not with his religion.

Thank you for listening.