

Seminars, Conferences, Addresses

Jihad: The Struggle for Peace and Justice

Ahmad Sarji bin Abdul Hamid

It is a great privilege and honor for me, as the founding chairman of the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia, to be invited to address this distinguished Second Parliament of the World's Religions. This topic—Jihad: Struggle for Peace and Justice—is very relevant, as we are still searching for a universally acceptable world order that can guarantee a true state of international peace through absolute justice. The world has yet to be completely free from a number of bloody atrocities and aggression that are direct infringements on human and individual rights. There is the unending Middle East conflict between the Palestinians and Israel for more than four decades, the "ethnic cleansing" of the Bosnians by the Serbs, and the Somali political and economic convulsion.

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The relevant world bodies have yet to exhibit their ability to handle and manage effectively, and with the desired firmness and vigor, such delicate international conflicts. It is quite apparent that the international community seems to depend on the world bodies that serve only the interests of a powerful few. Actions taken seem to be rather selective, to the extent that they create a degree of bias and injustice.

The problems of environmental degradation and resource distribution still loom large despite rapid and unprecedented advancement in science and technology. Abject poverty, undernourishment, and malnutrition remain prevalent in parts of Africa and Asia. The world now sees a system that concentrates political, military, economic, social, and cultural power in the hands of a privileged few located largely in the North. More specifically, within this global system the poor South had to "pay" the rich North approximately 132 billion dollars in debt servicing during 1988. It has been estimated that six hundred fifty thousand Third World children die each year. If we consider the global distribution of income—both between and within countries—we would discover that the richest 20 per cent of the world's population receives at least 150 times more than the poorest 20 per cent. What is even more distressing is a United Nations' study showing that "the poorest of the developing countries have more than half of the world's population and 5.6 per cent of world income."¹

Values, cultures, and religious influences on societies are the products of centuries. Globalization has tended to increase interaction between different civilizations. This increased interaction is not helping to create a better understanding of the prevailing differences inherent in different cultures, civilizations and religious faiths; on the contrary, it has tended to enhance civilizational consciousness. I firmly believe that we should try to construct bridges to enhance understanding and increase tolerance among members of different civilizations. At the same time, we should improve the international community's understanding by correcting the wrong image of Islam and Muslims created by the electronic and print media. It is grossly erroneous to associate violence by a handful of extremist Muslims with the general Muslim populace. It is equally wrong to neglect similar violence committed by other groups against Muslims. Everyone has to do his or her part to achieve world peace through a world order devoid of double standards, biased decisions, and injustice.

What the human race actually needs is peace that provides tranquility, calmness, a sense of security and confidence, the generation of creative ideas and thoughts, the advancement of knowledge, the physical development of the environment, and, most importantly, mental and spiritual de-

¹Danilo Turk, "How World Bank-IMF Policies Adversely Affect Human Rights," *Third World Resurgence* No. 33 (Penang: Third World Network, 1993), 17.

velopment. The Qur'an describes, in succinct terms, humanity's need for peace at the very outset of its creation, when the angels responded to God's announcement about His intention to create humans as the vicegerents of His creation: "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?" (2:30).

We see from this verse that humanity was already well known to the angels as having an inclination towards mischief and shedding blood. Thus they expressed their earnest concern about whether peace and tranquility could be established on Earth, despite humanity's need for it for its own survival and development.

The brotherhood taught by Islam can guarantee durable peace not only among Muslim individuals and countries but all over the world:

O mankind. Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread a broad multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another. (Qur'an 4:1)

It has been shown that war has no purpose acceptable to God other than establishing a peace based on justice, equity, and human brotherhood. Victory entitles the victor to one right only: the prevention of aggression and injustice. It would contradict the Islamic spirit if any peace agreement were based on tyranny and oppression or the usurpation or annihilation of what constitutes the rights of individuals as members of one human family: "And be not like unto her who unraveleth the thread after she hath made it strong to thin filaments, making your oaths a deceit between you because of a nation being more numerous [or greater] than [another] nation" (Qur'an 16:92).

Islam's view is that the purpose of peace agreements concluded between our Muslim brothers and sisters who are presently at war with their adversaries is not to perpetuate a state of conquest by keeping the defeated party in a state of constant deprivation and humiliation, but rather to establish the form of justice that God decrees equally for enemies and friends: ". . . and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty" (Qur'an 5:9).

Conditions of peace should not be dictated by the agents of fear and greed, for Allah, Who champions right and strengthens the believers in it, assures true victory only where it serves His ends: beneficence and justice. The concept of justice is simple, rational, and appeals to all people. In essence, it is to render to each person his or her entitlement or due:

Allah does command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice: verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you. For Allah is He Who hears and sees all things. (Qur'an 4:58)

This verse is a clear command to establish justice by rendering our trusts—authority, power, wealth, rights, respect, and dignity—to whom-ever they are due. Rightful dues should not be confined to physical or material rights only, as they include civil and human rights, trust, respect, and dignity. The second part of the verse, which is related to judgment with justice, also implies that no one should be harmed in the process, for any judgment that fails to render trusts to the rightful person is considered an outright infringement of justice.

Justice is a universal principle as well as a virtue shared by all people throughout all ages. It is the message of every scripture and the mission of every prophet:

We sent aforetime Our messengers with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down Iron, in which (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers: for Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might (and able to enforce His Will. (Qur'an 57:25)

The above verse reiterates the presence of messengers among humanity. In addition, three important items are mentioned as Allah's gifts: the Book, the Balance, and Iron, which are considered emblems of three elements that hold society together: revelation (commands good and forbids evil); balance (needed to weigh issues and questions of right and wrong) so that justice, in the sense of according to each person his or her entitlement, will prevail, and the strong arm of the law, which maintains sanctions against evil-doers; and iron (a very useful metal). Apart from its numerous uses, iron is also an emblem of strength, power, and discipline, which are required to establish of justice. Without such might, efforts towards justice may be futile, as we can see today in the international political scene. It is so mighty that it can even make unjust dealings by those in power eventually become acceptable by the populace.

The concept of justice goes beyond what is required under normal circumstances, for "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may receive admonition" (Qur'an

16:90). This commandment makes justice a more comprehensive term and inclusive of all the virtues of cold philosophy. Moreover, it asks for something warmer and more humane: the doing of good deeds (*ihsān*) even when not strictly demanded by justice. *Ihsān* can take the form of returning good for ill or evil, obliging those who "have no claim" on you, and, of course fulfilling those claims recognized in social life—taking care of one's relatives, for example. Similarly, all that is recognized as shameful, unjust, and encouraging any inward rebellion against Allah's law or our own conscience is to be avoided. In terms of application, it covers a large number of human situations: interpersonal relationships within the family and the community, interaction between communities and nations, and the interface between the individual and nature. It gives special emphasis to the weak and oppressed, such as orphans and women, the poor and the destitute, and provides specific commands to those in power to judge and rule with justice. Generally, justice should permeate all aspects of human life.

Justice is an established principle and an integral part of all societies. It is a matter of earnest desire to uphold absolute justice and partiality. As such, there is no justification to reject it.

The term "jihad" in its general sense means to strive or struggle in the way of God. It is not simply a struggle for one's life as such, but rather is a continuous struggle to steer oneself religiously in the cause of God. Such a struggle inevitably requires a true and sincere faith, which so fixes the individual's gaze on Allah that all selfish or worldly motives seem paltry and fade away. Secondly, it calls for an earnest and ceaseless activity that involves the sacrifice (if need be) of life, person, or property in the service of Allah: "Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah. They are the people who will achieve (salvation)" (Qur'an 9:20).

This verse actually describes the case of the early Muslims who were driven out of their own homes and their city and had no choice but to leave behind everything, including their beloved ones and belongings, in their flight to Madīnah. They had to struggle and strive with all their might and main to seek the pleasure of God. They are not only of the highest rank but have also achieved salvation.

Although jihad, in a narrow sense, implies fighting, it has always had a very negative connotation. It is not confined solely to holy war, but is also associated with aggression, atrocities, transgression, and destruction. Such an interpretation is erroneous, for war, when permitted, is to be waged for self-defense and as a way to establish freedom of worship, as is pointed out clearly: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you. But do not transgress limits, for Allah loveth not transgressors" (2:190).

Thus war is permitted only in self-defense, and mere brutal fighting is diametrically opposed to the whole spirit of jihad. When war is undertaken, it must be pushed vigorously, but only to restore peace and freedom for the worship of Allah. In any case, strict limits were not to be transgressed: Muslim soldiers were not to kill women, children, old and infirm men, to cut down trees and crops, or to withhold peace when the enemy comes to terms.

More importantly, jihad signifies the struggle against one's carnal desires. Indeed, the Prophet was reported to have told his companions who were returning from a holy war:

"Welcome home to all of you who are returning from a small jihad to a much bigger jihad." One of the Companions asked: "What is the much bigger jihad, O Prophet of God?" He replied, "It is the jihad against your carnal desires." He further said, "A true *mujāhid* (one who struggles) is the one who struggles against his carnal desires in obedience to Allah."²

It is clear from the above prophetic tradition that the highest form of jihad is to wage war against one's excessive carnal desires. Imām al Ghazālī clarifies this further by saying that the greatest jihad is the purification of the soul from vices and beautifying it with virtues.

From the above discussion, it is clear that jihad, in its most general sense, means to strive and struggle earnestly towards the betterment of the individual and society. Such a struggle requires one to be selfless, ready to sacrifice his or her property and life in order to achieve salvation. Thus jihad acts as a very powerful motivating force encouraging the individual to strive constantly to achieve this goal. It also implies undertaking the necessary planning and preparation to ensure success.

If we choose our goal to be the establishment and maintenance of peace through absolute justice, we have to give sufficient emphasis to the following issues: a) promotion of individual liberty, including freedom of worship; b) respect for the communities that individuals do or could value; c) distribution of resources that would ensure that all individuals are able to exercise their liberty and maintain their community life; and d) establishment of peaceful relations among communities based upon principles or procedures that reflect absolute justice.

What is necessary is the passion, desire, commitment, dedication, and motivation to ensure the establishment of world peace through international justice. It is in this area that jihad or continuous struggle be-

²Reported by al Tirmīdhī and Ibn Mājah. Al Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al Dīn*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al Fikr, n.d.), 66.

comes the most potent motivating force for providing the necessary and infinite supply of energy that would push each soul to strive and struggle endlessly. It is jihad in the most general and proper sense that will be required to right the wrongs and steer the world towards peace and prosperity through absolute and unwavering justice. This is the contribution Islam provides to the human race. With this understanding, Islamic countries have joined the United Nations with the hope that it can contribute to the advancement of justice among all people.

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James A. Brundage

Before we begin our examination of the concept of jihad, it is important to understand the historical context in which it emerged. The concept of jihad is rooted in the Islamic faith, which is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The concept of jihad is often misunderstood as a call to violence, but in reality, it is a call to strive for justice and righteousness. The concept of jihad is also a call to self-defense and to the defense of the oppressed. The concept of jihad is a central tenet of the Islamic faith, and it is a call to action for all Muslims. The concept of jihad is a call to strive for the best of the world and to bring about a better world for all people.

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