

RIGHTS OF MINORITIES IN ISLAM

Introduction

Under the Islamic law, non-Muslim minorities received rights and privileges that other minorities did not have under any other law in any other country. The relationship between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim minority is based on Allah's rule that says: {Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.}[Al-Mumtahanah: 9].

This verse has identified the ethical and legal basis, with which Muslims must treat non-Muslims, namely kindness and justice with all those who do not have enmity against them. The humanity did not know these rules before Islam. It lived for centuries after Islam, but suffered the horrors of lacking them. It still looks forward to the day when it can apply these rules in modern societies but to no avail due to passion, fanaticism and racism.

Minorities' right to freedom of belief

The Islamic law has ensured several rights and privileges for non-Muslim minorities. Perhaps the most important of which is the freedom of belief, which is stated in Allah's saying: {There is no coercion in religion}[Al-Baqarah: 256]. This was also reflected in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) letter to the People of the Scripture in Yemen where he invited them to Islam. He (peace be upon him) said: "...and a Jew or a Christian who embraces Islam becomes one of the believers, having their rights and

duties; and the one who remains Jewish or Christian should not be forced to disband his religion.."

As the Islamic law allowed non-Muslims to enjoy the freedom of belief, it enacted rules to preserve their lives, on the ground that they are human beings who have the right to life and existence. In this regard, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: "whoever kills a contracting man(a non-Muslim protected by the state or an agreement) he will not smell the Paradise".

Warning against doing non-Muslims injustice

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against commitment of injustice against non-Muslims and diminishment of their rights. He vowed to be the opponent of their aggressors. He said: "Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment."

One of the good stances of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in this regard is what happened with Al-Ansar in Khaybar, as Abdullah ibn Sahl Al-Ansari (May Allah be pleased with him) was killed in the lands of the Jews. It was mostly expected that one of the Jews killed him. However, there was no evidence. Therefore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not punish the Jews, but he asked them to take an oath. Sahl ibn Abu Hathma (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that a number of people from his tribe went to Khaybar and dispersed, and then they found one of them murdered. They said to the people with whom the corpse had been found, "You have killed our companion!" Those people said, "Neither have we killed him, nor do we know his killer." The bereaved group went to the Prophet and said, "O

Allah's Messenger! We went to Khaybar and found one of us murdered." The Prophet said, "Let the older among you come forward and speak." Then the Prophet said, to them, "Bring your proof against the killer." They said "We have no proof." The Prophet said, "Then they (the defendants) will take an oath." They said, "We do not accept the oaths of the Jews." Allah's Messenger did not like that the blood-money of the killed one be lost without compensation, so he paid one-hundred camels out of the camels of Zakat (to the relatives of the deceased) as Diya (blood-money).

Here, the Prophet (peace be upon him) did what no one even imagined, as he himself paid the blood-money from the funds of Muslims in order to calm down the anxiety of Al-Ansar without committing an injustice against the Jews. So, the Islamic state assumed the burden so that a suspicious rule would not be applied to a Jew!

Protection of non-Muslims' funds

The Islamic law has guaranteed the right to protect the funds of non-Muslims. It prohibited taking or seizing these funds unjustly through theft, usurpation, damage or any form of injustice. This was practically applied the Prophet's (peace be upon him) promise to the people of Najran, as he said: "The people of Najran and their surrounding areas would be under the protection of Allah and His Prophet Muhammad; their funds, religion, trade and everything small or big would be also safe..."

Moreover, a non-Muslim minority has the right to be guaranteed by the Islamic state from the state treasury – Bayt Al-Mal (House of funding) – in case of inability, old age or poverty, as the Prophet (peace be upon him)

says: "Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charge"[6], on the consideration that they are citizens just like Muslims, and the state is responsible for all of them before Allah (be He Exalted).

In this regard, Abu Ubayd[7]narrated in his book Al-Amwal (funds) on the authority of Sa'id ibn Al-Musayib[8]that he said: "The Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) gave alms to a Jewish family, so alms could be given to them."

What expresses the greatness of Islam and the humanity of the Islamic civilization in this regard is the story mentioned in the Sunnah (Prophet's traditions) books. The story says a funeral procession passed in front of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and he stood up. When he was told that it was a funeral of a Jew, he said, "Is it not a living being (soul)?"

These were the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Islam and the Islamic civilization. The rule is to respect every human being as long as he/she does not commit injustice or enmity.