

Friday Khutbah- 19/04/2013
The Tragedy of Muslims in Myanmar (Burma)

When a Muslim's heart is filled with Iman, it will also be filled with compassion and sympathy for other Muslims. He/she will then be touched by their pain and suffering and feel sadness for them. This feeling stems from the belief in the Qur'anic verse that: "The believers are brothers" and from the Hadith of Rasulullah (*salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*): "The likeness of the Muslims in their mutual affection, sympathy and compassion is like one body; whenever a part of it complains the rest of the body collapses into sleeplessness and fever."

Rasulullah (*salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) applied these feelings (affection, sympathy and compassion) during his lifetime. One example is that of the delegation of the tribe of Mudhar who came to meet Rasulullah (*salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) in Madinah. They barefooted and inadequately dressed. When the Prophet (*salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) saw their poverty, his face changed and he was very sad. He addressed his companions and encouraged them to give charity. When a lot food and clothing were brought until the delegation had enough, the face of the Prophet (*salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) shined with joy.

That was the example of Rasulullah (*salla Allahu alaihi wa sallam*); however, when we consider the state of Muslims today we find selfishness, self-absorption and lack of consideration for others. The bond of Islamic brotherhood has become weak, and has been replaced with *Jahili* bonds of nationalism and patriotism instead.

Oppression is very hard upon the human soul. It even becomes harder when the oppressed sees his brothers in Islam abandoning him at the time when he is in desperate need for their help. This is the state of some of our brother and sisters, who bear the *Shahada* of the truth, pray and face the same Qiblah like us. These are our Muslim brothers in Arakan in Myanmar, previously called Burma.

Burma or Myanmar lies in South East Asia. It bordered from the North by China, from the South by the Bengal Bay, from the East by China, Thailand and Laos and from the West by Bangladesh and China.

Burma is a mixture of ethnicities; the biggest being the Barman, the ruling race, followed by the Muslims who are known as the Rohingya. It is also comprises a mixture of religions. In addition to Buddhism, the religion of the majority there are the Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others.

The population of Myanmar is 60 million and there are more than eight million Muslims most of them live in Arakan region in the South West of Burma where they represent 70% of the population. Muslim are also to be found in the capital Rangoon and in other areas.

Islam reached Arakan during the time of the Abbasid caliph Haroun Al-Rasheed in the seventh century through the Arab traders who spread Islam in East and South Asia. Islam spread from Arakan to the rest of Burma. Arakan became an independent Muslim state which was ruled by 48 Sultans for three and half centuries until it was occupied by the Burmese Buddhist kingdom in 1784.

The Burman occupation period ended with the British occupation of Burma in 1824. In 1948 Burma gained its independence on condition that all the ethnicities were to be granted their independence after ten years if they so wish. However, once they gained their independence,

the Burman breached the agreement and continued to occupy Arakan against the wish of its Rohingya Muslims and the Buddhist (called Magh.)

Since that time the Rohingya Muslims have been subjected to repression, genocide and expulsion from their land. The situation became even worse after the fascist military coup in 1962.

The tragedy of the Rohingya Muslims is not a new one that started in recent months following the renewed violence against them perpetrated by the Buddhist mobs who were supported by the monks while the government has been turning a blind eye to them watching. The tragedy rather goes to many years before.

It is not possible to detail all the forms of oppression and persecution which the Muslims have been subjected to in one Khutba. Perhaps some of you have heard of or watched the killing of Muslim, burning of their villages and mass expulsion. Due to the shortage of time I will talk in some details about the two main problems the Rohingya Muslims are suffering from.

a) Denial of citizenship. In 1982 a law was introduced by the government which stated that any minority living in the country does not qualify for Myanmar citizenship unless it has been proven that it was present in the country before 1824, the year in which the British occupied Burma. Accordingly, the Muslims were denied citizenship despite the fact that they lived in Burma for centuries. The leaders of the Muslim minority in Rangoon say that Islam has been present in Burma since the first Hijri century while the government claims that Islam came with the British occupation in 1824.

b) Repeated mass expulsion of Muslims outside their homeland. The government aided by the Buddhist mobs and monks has been forcibly expelling Rohingya Muslims from their villages and bringing in non-Rohingyas to replace them. This policy has resulted in the expulsion of approximately two millions of the Rohingya population from Burma. They are living in dire conditions in a number of countries; many of them without any documentation. Those who remain are not allowed to travel without official permission, are banned from owning land, need a special permission to marry and are required to sign a commitment to have no more than two children.

It is obvious from the above description that the Burmese policy aims at emptying the Arakan region from Muslims by expelling them or keeping them poor and weak without any power.

The so-called democratic government which is managed by the military has refused to acknowledge Rohingya Muslims as citizens of Myanmar. Despite the repeated international calls to do so, the government did not include them in its list of more than 130 ethnic races published in July 2012. They continue to classify them as stateless Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh.

The situation of the Muslims in Arakan is very tragic. The United Nations considers them to be the most persecuted minority in the world and the most subjected to human rights abuses. Despite this description the United Nation has not done anything for them. Muslim governments and organisations have a responsibility towards their Muslim brothers. They should use whatever means at their disposal to demand that Muslims get equal rights like other citizens.

O Allah! We ask you to ease the hardship of the Muslims in Burma. O Allah! Protect and save them.

Some might ask: What is the benefit of talking about this tragedy and we don't have the solution for the problem, and there is nothing we could do?

It is not true that there is nothing we could do. The least is that we should know the state of these Muslims, remember them and be concerned and sad for them. We ought to realise the similitude of one body whenever a part of it complains the rest of the body responds by sleeplessness and fever.

Also when we become aware of their suffering this will make us pray for them and ask Allah (*subhanahu wa ta'ala*) to remove their difficulty and to give them victory over their enemy. Perhaps a sincere *du'a* from a sincere Muslim would make the difference and through it Allah changes their situation from hardship to ease.

Coming to know about their suffering will strengthen in our hearts and minds the Islamic concept of loyalty for the believers and disloyalty for the Kuffar. The result will be to align ourselves with the Muslims wherever they are and know the reality of the Kuffar and disconnect ourselves from them no matter what they do to enhance their image and pretend to be peaceful— like these Buddhists of Myanmar.

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