Peaceful Co-existence between Muslims and Non-Muslims
The Case of the Kurdistan Region in Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

It should be known that peaceful co-existence between religions, in this contemporary age is a social necessity, in political, social and academic fields and at all levels of life. Isolation is not helpful to progress and development. Historically, before the advent of Islam, the concept of peaceful co-existence between different religions was completely absent. In that special context, Islam produced the principle of peaceful co-existence between religions and cultures and established by the Prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him- at the state of Medinah. Talking about the Kurdistan Region society, the majority of the population is consisted of the Muslims and peaceful co-existence with the non-Muslim minorities is in a good way. This article concludes that harmony and peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in Kurdistan Region is leading to peaceful and tolerant society.

Keywords: Peaceful Co-existence, Muslims and Non-Muslims, the Kurdistan Region.

1. Introduction

Islam is a complete law of life. It encompasses the worldly affairs and spiritual matters, guide its followers to live a pure life in this world and to get reward in the Hereafter so that they be happy in this life and the day of resurrection. The Islamic concept of humanity is based on the principle of equality of all mankind. Yet, there are different religions in the world, three of them are called: Heavenly Religions which are: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The followers of these religions ought

to live together in peace way in the community in order to work for the benefit of humanity. However, if the principles of peace co-existence are absent, there will be chaos and war in the world. Hence, Islam has called for peaceful co-existence amongst religions and encouraged Muslims to treat with non-Muslims in a perfect way.

It should be recognized that as the population of mankind grows, human needs increase; this might cause clashes between civilizations and cultures. Experience from the two bloody world wars in the 20th century has taught mankind that they can obtain their goals better in a peaceful and collaborative environment.

In the light of above, this article strives to scrutinize that peaceful co-existence is a very pivotal principle to build a developing society in all circles of life.

2.   Peaceful Co-existence in Islamic Perspective

First of all, the term of "peaceful co-existence" terminology includes the meaning of peace in general, and aims in particular to vanish negative manifestations in society such as terrorist crimes or conflicts based on race, religion or sectarianism. The concept as well includes positive aspects of society such as stability, happiness and security[1].

A closer look at the verses of the Noble Qurʾān indicates that the principles of peaceful co-existence have been enacted by the Qurʾān in all scopes of life. Hence, Instructions of Islam call Muslims to live with other religions in peace and treat with their followers in a good way. Different verses in the Qurʾān frankly emphasize that religious co-existence is a real Islamic idea. It should be noted that the Noble Qurʾān mentioned the principles of peace co-existence when human beings had no idea of coexistence at all.

In the light of above, Islam has called for equality of all human beings as Allah declares:" O mankind! we have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-taqwa. Verily, Allah is

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[1]See: Mee Umar Naeef, **Lughāt al-Ḥiwār wā atharuha ʿālla al-ssilm al-ijtmaʿīī**, p.3.

All-Knowing, Well-Acquainted (with all things)"[2]. (Al-Hujurat:13). It should be known that equality, which has been emphasized in this verse, among all mankind is a major condition for peaceful co-existence. Indeed, racism and discrimination between mankind are denounced by Islam.

Islam obviously has declared that religious freedom is maintained and people have right to choose the religion that they want. It is stated in the Qur'ān: "There is no compulsion in religion"[3]. (Al-Baqara: 256). This denotes that Islam is far from compulsion and violence and this is a strong step to establish the columns of peaceful co-existence in society.

Likewise, Islam orders Muslims to respect other religions and prohibits insulting the idols of disbelievers. Allah -the Almighty- says:" Insult not those whom they (disbelievers) worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge ".[4] (Al-anam9-: 108).

In addition, Islam vindicates peaceful co-existence on the basis of common principles that Islam and previous heavenly religions shared. Allah advises mankind not to discriminate among different messengers of Allah as whatever revealed to them was from Allah: "Say [O Muslims]: We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob, and to Al-asbāt(the offspring of the twelve sons of Jacob), and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam)"[5]. (Al-Baqarah: 136).

Islam as well welcomes every offer of cease-fire, cessation of hostility. Allah-the Almighty- orders the Prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him- to welcome an offer of peace made by the enemy in the battlefield :" But if they incline to peace, you (also) incline to it, and (put your) trust in Allah"[6]. (Anfāl: 61).

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[2] **Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language**, King Fahd Complex for the printing of the Holy Qur'ān, Madinh, K.S.A, p. 572.
[3] The same reference, p. 52.
[4] The same reference, p. 162.
[5] The same reference, p. 25.
[6] The same reference, p. 207

It should be noted that Islam has clearly established the principles of treating with non-Muslims, Allah says:" Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes and helped to drive you out, that Allah forbids you to befriend them. And whosoever will befriend them, then such are the wrong-doers"[7]. (Al-Mumtahanah: 8, 9). This mean that Islam a religion that can live with all groups of human beings except the fighting groups[8].

Similarly, Islam insisted Muslims on dialogue with non-Muslims and clarified that dialogue between religions is a pivotal norm for peaceful co-existence. The examples are plentiful in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Allah says:" And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."(Al-ankabut: 46).

On the other hand, by looking at the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him- we can find numerous examples for dialogues with non-Muslims such as the dialogue that the Prophet -peace be upon him- made with the polytheists of Quraysh . His dialogue with the people of Yathrib in the first and second pledge of Aqaba. His dialogue with the Jews of Madina. His dialogue with the Christians of Najran in his Mosque. His dialogue with the hypocrites of Madina.

Moreover, another example for principles of peaceful co-existence is that the prophet Muhammad -peace be upon him- once passed by a Jewish funeral and he stood up. He was informed that it was a Jewish funeral. He said: are they not human beings[9]. This example and many others tell us that Islam is practicing peaceful co-existence practically not just in theory.

As well, Islam has stated that Muslims are permitted to get married from the followers of (Judaism, Christianity), and eat from their food except what has been

[7] The same reference, p. 614.
[8] Eisam Ahmad Al-basheer, **Khusūsyyah al-hādārah al-'iislamia**, p.59-60.
[9] Al-Bukhārī, **Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī**, Hadith Number (1250), Vol.1, p.441.

declared prohibited in Islam. Allah says:" The food(slaughtered cattle, eatable animals) of the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them. (Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given the Scripture before your time when you have given their due Mahr, desiring chastity, not committing illegal sexual intercourse, nor taking them as girl-friends". (Al-Maidah:5).

It should be highlighted that in the light of the Qur'ānic instructions, the prophet Muhammad -peace be upon him- established a peaceful state at Medinah and Muslims and non-Muslims were live in a state of peaceful co-existence and co-operation along with their differences of cultures and religions. Furthermore, the prophet -peace be upon him- wrote the first Constitution in the history of human beings, under the title "Mithaq al-Madinah". It is very magnificent to note that in this Constitution, the Prophet -peace be upon him- gave respect and equal status to all the nations of different cultures and religions who were living under the shadow of that Muslim state, as well as protected fundamental human rights for all citizens, including equality, cooperation and freedom of religion. In brief, the "Mithaq al-Madinah" was the first constitution in history to establish religious freedom as an essential constitutional right.

In a nutshell, Islamic teachings provides strong principles for peaceful co-existence amongst all citizens irrespective of their religions, nations, and colors. Islam considers that the concept of differences between people is one of Allah's principles in the world and occurs by Allah's will. Islam is an educational, tolerant university that educate people to coexist with other religions, cultures, and colors in a peace way.

3. Peaceful Co-existence in Kurdistan Region

First of all, the population of Kurdistan Region is 5.2 million and increasing, the four governorates of Erbil, Slemani, Duhok and Halabja cover approximately 40,000 square kilometers - larger than the Netherlands and four times the area of Lebanon. This includes the governorates administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government but does not include areas of Kurdistan outside of KRG administration, such as Kirkuk. The capital and the seat of the Kurdistan Regional

Government is Erbil, a city known in Kurdish as Hawler. The Citadel in Erbil is considered the world's oldest continuously inhabited settlement. The next largest cities are Slemani and Dohuk. The Kurdish language is of Indo-European origin and is among the family of Iranian languages, such as Persian and Pashto, and is distinct from Arabic. The two main dialects are Sorani and Kurmanji[10].

In addition, the majority of people in the Kurdistan Region are Sunni Muslims, mainly of the Shafi'i school. Some Muslims in the Region follow Sufi orders. There are also a large number of Christians of different churches, such as Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Armenian, and Catholic Chaldean. A religion that is practiced only in Kurdistan is Yazidism, which has tens of thousands of adherents. The Kaka'i faith is also practised in the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Regional Government protects people's freedom to practice their religion and promotes inter-faith tolerance. Thousands of Christian families have fled violence and threats in other parts of Iraq and found refuge in the Kurdistan Region[11].

The followers of religions in Kurdistan Region such as Muslims, Jews, Christians, Yezidis and Kakayis live together in peace, harmony, security and stability, and all participated in the construction of Kurdistan, enriching its culture and developing its civilization, they made great sacrifices for this country, and no one denies that, the history of Kurdistan is full of facts and events that prove that[12].

It should be mentioned that there are a lot of religious institutes in the Kurdistan Region such as the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs which supervises on religious affairs and respect all religions and their followers, even there is a general directorate for Christians and another for Yazidis.

Another important institute in Kurdistan Region is Islamic Scholars Union which oversees all Islamic preaches. It has a strong relationship with other religions and its speech is based on moderation method that instills the principles of peace co-existence in the society.

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[10]http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/page.aspx?l=12&s=050000&r=300&p=210.
[11] The same reference.
[12] Arafat Karam Stuni, **Falsafat al-Taʿāush al-SSlmi baena al-Adyān**, vol.1, p.497

There are also some Islamic colleges that educate its students on the moderation method and its curriculum is based on that. And all these institutes participate to spread the soul of peaceful co-existence among citizens of Kurdistan Region.

A study that has been recently published (2016) in the Kurdistan Region shows the following details about the peaceful co-existence[13]:

- 84,3% believe that people have the religious freedom, which means peace co-existence is very strong.

- 40,8% believe that religion differences lead to instability in society. This means that religion differences have a dispensable role in causing intolerance in community so that there should be principles of peace co-existence among the followers of religions in order to live together. This is absolutely what Islam wants to be done in society.

- 77% take care about the shared matters among religions. This is a magnificent step in the field of peace co-existence. To be fruitful, when the followers of different religions believe that there are the shared matters among them, then, they can live together, respect each other.

- 75% believe that differences among religions should not lead to rejecting the other; even they do not follow the same religion. This is also another vital step to have peaceful co-existence in community.

-71% believe that social relations are very strong amongst the followers of religions in Kurdistan Region.

- 80, 7% receive the religious speech which call on respecting the other, and live with each other in a peace way.

This study and others show that peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Kurdistan Region is very good. However, it needs to be grown.

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[13] See, Adam Bedar: **Waqāʿī al-Taʿāush wa Taqabbul al-Akhar wā Khitāb al-karāhyyah ʿālla al-Asās al-ddinī**, , Erbil, 2016, p. 45- 46.

4. Conclusion

The above discussions illustrate that Islam has established the principles of peaceful co-existence in the society and encouraged Muslims to live with non-Muslims in a peace way. The Noble Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad-peace be upon him- emphasize that. This research denotes that peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Kurdistan Region is very good. However, it needs to be grown.

5. References

1. Adam Bedar, **Waqāʿī al-Taʿāush wa Taqabbul al-Akhar wā Khitāb al-karāhyyah ʿālla al-Asās al-ddinī**:, Erbil, 2016.
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7. http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/page.aspx?l=12&s=050000&r=300&p=210,