

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

KHUTBA - SREBRENICA MEMORIAL DAY

Introduction

On this day of 11th July a small town in Bosnia called 'Srebrenica' fell at the hands of the perpetrators General Ratko Mladić and his Serbian paramilitary units. In the days following, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered and buried in mass graves. The United Nations called it "the greatest atrocity on European soil since the Second World War".

The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunal ruled that the mass executions in Srebrenica constituted genocide

The European Parliament passed a resolution on 15th January 2009 calling on all European countries to mark 11 July as Srebrenica Memorial Day to honour the victims and make a pledge to tackle hatred and intolerance to create a better and safer society for all.

Today many people are remembering the victims by holding Srebrenica Memorial Day, doing remembrance prayers or making pledges to tackle hatred and intolerance wherever they find these. Mosques across the UK are holding special sermons and prayers, and remembrance Iftar events to honour the survivors and remember those who were ethnically cleansed and brutally murdered simply because of who they were.

Islamic teachings about intolerance

The Srebrenica genocide occurred because of intolerance and hatred. It is therefore befitting to remind ourselves of the Islamic teachings about harbouring hatred against an individual or a community.

In Islam, huge emphasis is placed on ensuring that hatred of others does not lead to unjust actions. There is never any excuse or justification for behaving unjustly towards others in Islam whether one feels aggrieved at injustices they may have experienced or not. The Qur'an instructs Muslims to maintain justice in their dealings with others, even with those they consider to be enemies: 'O believers, bearers of justice (and bearers of) witness for the sake of God. Let not hatred of people incite you to act unjustly; be just-this is nearer to righteousness. And fear God surely God is aware of what you do.' (Qur'an, 5:8). The principle of forgiveness over anger and revenge is also embodied in the Holy Qur'an: 'Those who overcome anger and forgive people, God loves those who do good' (Qur'an, 3:134).

Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) mission was spreading love and peace and not inflicting harm or inciting hatred. Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has openly denounced such actions: 'There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm'. (Ibn Majah). It is tragic that these words appear to have been lost on those engaging in conflict across the world.

Instead of focusing on and being unable to overcome our differences, Islam encourages Muslims to learn to appreciate differences and co-operate with each other on matters of good to establish peace and security in the world. Allah encourages us in the Glorious Qur'an to work with people of other faiths to establish peace: 'And if they incline to peace, you also incline towards it, and trust in Allah. Remember! He is the Hearer, the Knower.'(Qur'an 8:61).

The Qur'an further states: '...Do not follow your passions in case you may swerve from justice, and if you twist or turn, then Allah is aware of your doings.' (Qur'an 4:135)

Desiring same for others

It is beautiful to note that Islam places so much emphasis on desiring the same things as one desires for oneself for the whole of humanity, irrespective of faith and background. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said, 'Love for people what you love for yourself' (Bukhari). This principle is emphasised further by stating that true faith is only achieved by desiring the same outcome for other people as one would wish for himself: 'No servant [of Allah] truly achieves true faith until he loves for people what he loves for himself.' (Ahmad). The term 'people' includes persons of all colours, backgrounds and faiths. Just as a Muslim would like to live in a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous society, similarly he should strive to bring harmony, prosperity, comfort and ease to others in society.

Allah also warns that hatred of others should not lead Muslims towards carrying out acts of discrimination and injustice. The Qur'an requires us to always be just, even though it may go against our own wishes: 'O Believers, stand firmly for justice, giving witness for Allah, even though it be against yourselves, your parents or your relations ...'(Qur'an 4:135)

Only if these golden principles were applied by the world, prejudice and injustice would not exist and nor would hatred, violence and loss of lives.

It could happen anywhere and to anyone else

The mass murder of Bosnian Muslims on the doorstep of Europe highlights that it could happen anywhere and to anyone else. We and our families, our towns and our nations will be safe when all people and communities are tolerant and understanding of each other. That is why it is critically important that we continue to remember those who were murdered and guard against the causes of such heinous crimes. Not only is it important that the victims of Srebrenica are not forgotten and that the 11 July commemorations continue, but we also need to inoculate ourselves against indifference to the suffering of anyone who is placed in peril anywhere in the world.

Finally, we pray that Lord Almighty grants justice to all those who have suffered injustice, in particular, the people of Bosnia, and establish peace in the world. The Noble Qur'an says: "Allah loves those who are just" (Qur'an 5:42) and "Allah is with the patient." (Qur'an 2: 153).

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