

The Role of Muslim Women in Civil Society in Promoting Values and Principles for Building Peace: Action Guide from The Qur'ān

Peranan Wanita Muslim dalam Masyarakat Awam dalam Mempromosikan Nilai dan Prinsip untuk Membina Keamanan: Panduan Tindakan dari Al-Quran

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Abstract: The Muslim World has witnessed conflicts in different areas, which have hindered the developmental efforts of the nations concerned. Most victims of these conflicts are women and children. This article attempts to elaborate the role of Muslim women as a crucial segment in civil society in initiating peace building through the nurturing process. It maintains that the adoption of the principles and values derived from the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet is necessary as a process of lifelong learning. Those identified values constitute the framework of this article, and it adopts the method of textual analysis. This article concludes that through the implementation of Islamic values and frameworks for peace building, Muslim women in a civil society are able to play a significant role in initiating peace building and promoting peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: Muslim women, civil society, peace building and peace co-existence

Abstrak: Dunia Islam khususnya telah menyaksikan konflik di pelbagai daerah yang berbeza. Konflik ini telah menghalang usaha kearah pembangunan Kawasan yang berkenaan. Kebanyakan mangsa konflik ini adalah wanita dan kanak-kanak. Artikel ini cuba untuk menghuraikan peranan wanita Islam sebagai segmen penting dalam masyarakat madani dalam membangun proses kedamaian dengan mendidik dan memupuk prinsip dan nilai murni janaan al-Qur'an. Penggunaan prinsip dan nilai yang dikutip dari ayat-ayat Qur'an dan hadis Rasulullah adalah keperluan yang mendesak sebagai wadah bagi proses pembelajaran sepanjang hayat. Nilai-nilai yang dikenal pasti merupakan rangka kerja artikel ini, dan metod yang dirujuk adalah analisis teks. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahawa melalui pelaksanaan nilai-nilai dan kerangka kerja Islam bagi proses kedamaian, wanita Islam dalam masyarakat madani mampu memainkan peranan penting dalam memulakan pembinaan keamanan dan menggalakkan kehidupan yang harmonis, sejahtera dan saling bantu membantu dalam masyarakat majmuk.

Kata kunci: Wanita Islam, masyarakat madani, kedamaian, harmonis dan majmuk

Introduction

Nowadays, the world community needs to lead a life of peaceful coexistence, as it is the natural order of the vast universe. For humankind to sustain harmonious coexistence, it is essential for people to observe values and principles that shaped a proper social ethics and etiquettes. For example, acceptance of and respect for each other are important elements for coexistence to take place. To achieve this, we need to educate our generation as education plays an indispensable role in peace building. Civil society provides sphere, which accommodates peace building. Community, institution, civil society organizations and international global agencies have outlined educational activities to address issues related to peace building in pluralistic plural society. Women are one of the important segments in civil society who can play a significant role in promoting peaceful coexistence. Hence, the objective of article is to elaborate the role of Muslim women in civil society in peace building based on the principles and frameworks stated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

Society as duly understood refers to a group or community connected by common interests and group activities. One of the definitions of civil society is the non-market and non-state arena. Civil society is the arena outside of the family, the state and the market where people socialize with each other to advance common interests. A civil society comprises of non-governmental organizations and institutions based on the will and interest of the citizens of a country. Civil society can include family and the immediate circle of acquaintances and this is distinct from the government and business. Civil society comprises of NGOs, community-based institutions, grass-root organization, religious communities and churches, voluntary association and private socio-economy association. Most civil society associations in Europe, including secular and humanist associations play a crucial role in influencing social issues such as family values, tolerance, freedom of conscience and world peace. Like the media, M. Kamal (2011) said that these associations can play the role as pressure groups and watchdogs to hold government bodies and civil servants accountable in terms of protection of the society and peace building. Civil society and democracy have now become the hymn of industrialized nations. As the 21st century progresses, the less developed nations such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa are now calling for greater representation and political power sharing in their efforts to push their governments towards

more accountability where the rule of law and social justice prevail.

Peace building according to the United Nations (2017) is an intervention act designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating sustainable peace. Peace building activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society politically and socioeconomically. In fact, the term "peace building" was first coined by Johan Galtung (1975) to reflect three approaches to peace: peace keeping, peacemaking, and peace building. He said that a sustainable transformative approach consists of various aspects such as psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and military levels.

Recent developments in the use of the concept of peace-building are closely related to the notion of "human security." Although it is a relatively new concept, human security is now widely used to describe the complex interrelated threats associated with civil war, genocide and the displacement of populations. All proponents of human security agree that its primary goal is the protection of individuals. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on what type of threat that protected individual.

In Islam peace building is an ongoing proses of vicegerency. The reason is that Islam posits vicegerency as responsibility of administrating life according to Sharī'ah and applicable to both men and women alike. Allāh, the Creator of the Universe hinted to the angels of His intention to create vicegerents on earth and without indicating a specific sex. This means that the responsibility to administer life as a vicegerent falls on both men and women. They are equally responsible to create peaceful coexistence and accountable before Allāh (Sūrat al-Baqarah, 2:30).

The primary role of women has been as the caregiver to the family. Because of their innate femininity, they can understand their fundamental role in the household and in society as well. In fact, women feel that they need to extend their role to nurture peace building among society and among people at large. Historically, the Qur'an has documented the participation of Muslim women in peace building, stated as follows: If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge has come to thee, say:

"Come! Let us gather - our sons and your sons, our women (nisā'anā) and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!" (Sūrat Al Imrān, 3:61)

"Nisā'" in this verse refers to the women amongst the Muslims who followed Prophet Muḥammad in the event

of mubāhalah and the term Nisā'anā (our women) here is favourably used by the Prophet as an invitation to the said event. This verse indicates the significant role of women during the time of Prophet Muḥammad as his great supporters in settling dispute.

In the early history of Islam, the Muslimāt companions of Prophet Muḥammad played many outstanding roles in safeguarding peace building. Khadījah Khuwaylid (d. 2 AH/ 619 CE) for instance, upon hearing that some destitute people intended to marry, would send assistance to them. A report stated that Khadījah gave her earnings to the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the sick. Mubarakpuri (1996) reported that she helped poor girls get married and provided their dowry. In fact, to describe the best role of Khadījah in peace building, Prophet Muḥammad once said that the four greatest women among humankind are Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad, Maryam bint 'Imrān and Āsiyah bint Muzāhim (the wife of Fir'aūn).

Today, we witness astonishing rates of women rising to roles of leadership. The Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (2005) has stipulated seven (7) points to sustain the idea that "women are instrumental in building bridges rather than walls". Among others, it includes the rights to education, safety, inheritance and job equity. Following Kofi Annan's suggestions, Gretchen (2011) stated in his book: *Power, Voice and Rights*, that the participation of women is critical to the success of any peace building process.

In terms of women's contributions in implementing religious teachings to create a just and peaceful society Rekha (2011) said that religion and spiritual identity form a crucial principle in peace building. She added that peace could be achieved by referring, understanding, and relevantizing the Qur'ānic teaching on understanding the soul in the context of what is necessary for bringing about sincere and durable peace. Bangladesh has been reported as among the first countries to deploy all-female UN police units in peacekeeping operations. A first contingent of 160 women police officers in 2010 was sent to Haiti (Rekha, 2011). In Somalia, a report said that Muslim women have also been effective in influencing their elders and others to intervene in conflict and have mobilized resources to finance and run peace meetings and support demobilization. While men typically focus on achieving a political settlement, with the assumption that peace will ensue, women's vision of peace exceeds this and includes sustainable livelihoods, education, truth and reconciliation (Rekha, 2011). However, whilst women peacebuilders have made vital contributions to peace processes in diverse places like Northern

Ireland, Guatemala and Liberia, the reality remains that women are denied meaningful participation in many peace processes.

Methodology

This method chosen for this article is qualitative in nature whereby several but relevant Qur'Ēnic verses are analyzed to derive the framework and principles for peace building.

Findings and Discussion

The role of Muslim women as civil society in building peace is indispensable. The Islamic paradigm of a civil society is built on common morality which is closely related to maslaḥah of the ummah.

1. Qur'anic call

The Qur'an itself has urged Muslims to establish peace building among the people in this world. For example:

O You who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or you kin, and whether it be against rich or poor: For God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts of your hearts, lest you swerve, and if distort justice or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do. (Sūrat a-Nisā', 4:135).

From the verses above, it is observed that justice is the definitive point of the Qur'ānic teaching. Furthermore, pursuing justice through non-violent method is a more effective and viable strategy. Values like uprightness, equity and temperance are important in the act of upholding justice so that Almighty Allāh may grant social harmony and peace (salām). Even the word Islam itself, with its root word salama, signifies, in a broad sense the making of peace. Therefore, those who submit to Almighty Allāh need to enjoin others to live harmoniously and peacefully. It also deals with the concept of jihad a struggle against injustice and structural violence. This means that peace in Islam means not only an absence of war, but also the struggle towards the eradication of the possibility for clashes and the waste and exploitation it creates. Peace, therefore, is strictly Allah's true purpose for rahmah or compassion for humanity.

2. The Qur'ānic framework for Peace Building

To initiate peace building, Muslim women in civil society should educate the society as to how people accommodate others of different religions and beliefs. Muslim women in civil society need to nurture Muslim youth, particularly those in a pluralistic society to respect

others. Promoting peace building in society should be guided by the Qur'anic values and principles outlined below:

- a. *ta'āruf*
- b. *islāh*
- c. *mujādalah*

a. *ta'āruf*

The Qur'an uses the term *ta'āruf* to refer to an act of knowing, understanding, and building relations. This term is extracted from the verse:

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you from male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know (ta'āruf) one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware". (Sūrat al-Hujūrāt, 49:13)

The first impression of peacebuilding is that religious diversity and the multiplicity of spiritual paths to truth is of divine origin as verified in the above verse. It plainly revealed that creating human beings with different nations and tribes, each with its own spiritual path is among the signs of wisdom of Almighty Allah. He intends to do so because He wants all of us to learn and benefit from each other's knowledge. Muslim women can significantly play their role by applying *ta'āruf* to clarify and negate the bad assumptions that others have towards us (Muslims). It can be done if we as Muslims show them good examples.

b. *islāh*

The term *islāh* is mentioned in the Qur'an in many circumstances signifying the act of bridge building, reconciling, restoring relations, and resolving conflicts. Another derivative of *islāh* is *sulḥ*. It literally means peacebuilding. This relates to the verse:

"There is no good in much of their secret conferences save (in) him who enjoined almsgiving and kindness and peace-making among the people. Whoso doeth that, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, We shall bestow on him a vast reward". (Sūrat al-Nisā', 4:114)

Explaining the term *islāh* in the context of "secret conferences" as mentioned above, Yūsuf 'Alī (1983) is of the opinion that Islam loves honesty in all consultations and doings. However, secrecy is permissible in three (3) circumstances, as follows.

- i. to respect the feeling of recipients of charity deeds,
- ii. to avoid humiliating the lawbreaker, and
- iii. to protect the right of conciliating parties to a quarrel

Therefore, to practice *islāh* or acting as the agent of peace in sincerity devoid of secrecy is the spirit of peace building. Indeed, the main purpose of peace building is to adopt good relations and serene coexistence. The role of

Muslim women in civil society is to assist conciliation not only in Muslims community but also among non-Muslims community

c. *mujādalah*

The Qur'an also uses the term *mujādalah* and to demonstrate an attempt to engage with others in a decent manner while initiating peace building. Muslim men and women alike are urged to display respect for others when engaging in peace building activities. This advised is quoted in Sūrat al-Ankabūt, verse 46:

And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender

When interfaith dialogue happened between Muslims and non-Muslims, the early Muslims exhibited their respect for others. Indeed, mere disputes were futile. In achieving the purpose of the dialogue, the early Muslims also searched for true common ground of believe and showed kindness, sincerity, and genuine intention for good of others. When they differed, they did it with dignity and avoided punitive languages. That is how peace building was established. Thus, Muslim women in their organization should replicate this noble example.

Furthermore, initiating peacebuilding requires us to inculcate in ourselves noble values such as patience and forgiveness. It is a higher virtue to forgive others rather than to maintain hatred. It is a greater virtue if we strive, with full determination against hatred that rages within ourselves which later may reflect in our action with full fortitude. In fact, the Prophet himself showed neither hatred against others nor any inclination of using force in any form, even for self-defence. The non-violent axiom is the dictum practiced by the Prophet even when the early Muslims were under threat, tortured, accused of blasphemy, humiliated, and ostracized. He even prayed when persecuted during the Makkah era, saying: "Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do" (al-Tabrizī, 1975).

This value of forgiveness makes up the virtue of *tasāmuḥ* or tolerance in today's adage. *Tasāmuḥ* is a religious responsibility. It does not mean concession, lack of principles or lack of seriousness about one's principles (Yasein, 2004). Thus, *tasāmuḥ* is not a position of compromising justice. Rather it can be instrumental in peace building efforts by subjugating animalistic ego over hatred of others, leading to the willingness to surrender one's pride even if one is in the right. Discussions must be done in a civilized manner that includes courtesy, good citizenship, concern for wellbeing of others, and the

communities though they may realize that some clashes are unavoidable. In other words, the role of women in civil society is thus, working for good without insisting the beliefs can spare the public place for diverse human religion experience.

3. Qur'ānic principles of peace building

Apart from the above terms that are specifically related to peace building, there are other Qur'ānic principles outlined for people to practice. Some of which are people's ability to have common understanding on:

- a. universal and common ethics by acknowledging
- b. the pursuit of justice in all lifestyles that uphold
- c. human dignity by realizing
- d. the collective goods in doing
- e. khayr and ihsān through the process of
- f. ta'āwun and thus man can understand
- g. unity in diversity

a. Universal and common Ethics

In promoting harmony in a pluralistic society, Kamar Oniah (2013) said that man does not undermine the fundamental religious belief system. Although at the spiritual level, religions do not concur with each other for each has its own exclusive way, at the ethical level, religions can be similar. Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have identified some ethical values and principles related to peace building, which are as not only praiseworthy in Islam but also transcend other religions as well. The values, to mention a few, are affection, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and empathy. At the level of ethics, human beings' function as members of a human family, assisting each other where necessary. There is a need to continuously nurture the good character and ethical practices among people so that peaceful coexistence can be created, developed, and improved within a course of time thus, enabling people to live harmoniously with others. However, in doing so, Kamar Oniah (2013) suggested that Muslims and non-Muslims alike can utilize a few amiable formulae such as:

- i. the principle of non-interference and intrusion
- ii. the principle of deference and decorum
- iii. the principle of sympathy and empathy
- iv. the principle communal cooperation and
- v. the principle of unity and diversity

When these formulae are in practice, the pursuit of justice can take place.

b. Pursuit of Justice

Under the purview of Islamic law, protection for the non-Muslims is assured off. They are to be treated justly and humanely. The objective of promoting peace building is the pursuit of justice. Al-Qur'ān has clarified that all

diverse religious communities are equally responsible to ensure the establishment of a social order in the world for the sake of goodness for there is no compulsion in Islam (Sūrat al-Baqarah, 2:256).

In Islam, acting for the cause of God is considered synonymous with pursuing justice and the call for justice is very flexible whether it is a small one, or something big. It is not about the quantity of the actions but the quality of intention depending on one's ability. This indicates that Allah is just, in considering the differences of His servants. It also been emphasized on them the manner that Allah commands upon us, not only because He favored it but also because His commandments regarding justice is already embedded in, for example zakāṭ, ṣadaqah, and waṣṣīyah (Abu Nimir, 2008). Treating one another justly is a divine command and an ethical recognition that justice emphasizes goodness, proving the correlation between moral convictions, God purposes, and the purpose of life on earth as guided by revelation. These values convince us that the fiṭrah of human being and belief systems could shoulder the social responsibility towards the foundation of justice and equality in the world.

c. Human Dignity

Islam conveys the universality of humankind through the equality in creation, rights, treatment, and solidarity among all people. It also emphasizes the dignity of men as the best creation among His creations. At the same time, this is a reminder that our existence in this world comes with a specific purpose. Unlike other creations, we can think and the talent to decide between right and wrong. These abilities however come with accountability and responsibility where we must bear the consequences of our own choice of actions. Therefore, here are the reasons why protection of life and respect for human dignity are important and considered as part of an act of submission to Allah. Thus, Muslim women guided by the Islamic worldview should perceive the work, worship and life should be aimed at preserving, protecting and achieving human pride and dignity as the main principle and values in Islam (Abu Nimir, 2008).

d. Responsibility towards Collective Good

The Qur'ān teaches humanity about the natural relationship with God and the social relationship with human beings. The very source of human relation is the creation of the first human couple, so human must have the greatest social and positive bond among one another as illustrated in verses one and two of Sūrat al-Mā'idah:

O you who believe! Fulfill (your) obligations. Lawful to you (for food) are all the beasts of cattle except that which will be announced to you (herein), game (also) being

unlawful when you assume Ihram Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of Allah, nor of the Sacred Month, nor of the sacrificial animal brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands, nor the people coming to the Sacred House.... Help you one another in al-birr and al-taqwā, but do not help one another in sin and transgression...

The divine command as projected above proves that the interpersonal relationship between institutions is crucial. In order to encourage the establishment of spiritual-moral community, interpersonal relationship must be based on the willingness of individuals and the readiness to accept and face the challenges in upholding good deeds and working for common good.

e. Doing Good (Khayr and Ihsān)

Doing good leads to social empowerment. The emphasize here is not on the power and force, but that society becomes powerful with the act of ihsān and good actions. In other words, community become strong with the help of others, in the sense that the ummah needs to be united in order to ensure their power and the dynamicity. Acts of social and economic justice are so important that it is comparable to acts of worship. The community has the obligation to help others especially on those who are underprivileged. Doing good actions extends beyond the interpersonal level to the community level, in which the aim of Islam is a world devoid of suffering and poverty.

f. Ta'āwun

Muslim women in civil society need to nurture Muslims in a pluralistic society to relate to and accommodate others. In this regard, the Qur'ān uses the term ta'āwun, a decree for people to work together for the each other's betterment. If this spirit of extending hands to others is sincerely implemented, the well-being of average can be guaranteed. For that matter, the Qur'ān stipulates in SĒrat al-MĒ'idah, verse two:

"O ye who believe! Profane not Allah's monuments nor the Sacred Month nor the offerings nor those garlands, nor those repairing to the Sacred House, seeking the grace and pleasure of their Lord. But when ye have left the sacred territory, then go hunting (if ye will). And let not your hatred of a folk who (once) stopped your going to the inviolable place of worship seduce you to transgress; but help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression but keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment.

Those who want to tear down the human community, which is the opposite of ta'āwun, are strongly condemned. If we do well, the good will return to us in unexpected ways. The Qur'ān also applies the terms istabiq al-khayrāt. It literally means to excel and to compete in doing good deeds. When it comes to doing good deeds, Muslims must outperform non-Muslims. Indeed, the Qur'ān

strongly urges us to do as mentioned in verse forty-eight (48) of Surat al-Ma'idah:

"And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth that hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community? But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ"

If non-Muslims extend their hands in collaboration, peacebuilding or other kinds of constructive works for the community, Muslims must not fail to extend their hands as well. However, it would be better if Muslims themselves stand on the first row and become the leaders. Prophet Muḥammad had shown us a good example of being the forefront leader in settling the dispute of placing the Black Stone in its proper place (Mubarakpuri 1996). This incident had shown that peaceful and creative adjudication clarifies how Muslims can adopt a nonaggressive method to solve problems when tackling their own inner and outer glitches. Concisely we need to consciously engage in problem solving and it is our responsibility to complete the whole process in sincerity. In Islam, there are three major types of responsibilities which Almighty Allah will judge it. They are:

- i. responsibility to Allah, known also as 'ibādah
- ii. responsibility to oneself,
- iii. responsibility to live in harmony with others

This would mean that Islam as a name of a religion is not just a plain claim. Indeed, its name reveals its fundamental characteristics. This is proven when Islam as a religion of peace highly encourages peacebuilding, and with the spirit of building ways for peace, it leads to a harmonious life.

From another viewpoint, collaborative approach to peace building is more effective than an individual work. For example, in managing peace, collaborative act through shūrā is highly sought after. In this system, the opinions or decision-making is not an exclusive right to the higher authority but inclusive of the lower hierarchy. All opinions are considered and from that, the best will be chosen. This system also enables us to address diverse opinions from various levels of the masses. Differences in opinions are supposed to be regarded as a unique feature of mankind with which we can complement each other until we are able to create a new system, multicultural and pluralist in practice.

In spite of a few perceptions of collective cooperation within the religious community as neutral or irreconcilable individual in terms of interests in a democratic country, everybody is free to express their point of views regardless of creed. Religious tolerance is what we call a prerequisite for a peaceful settling of differences of between individuals. If a Christian proposed a better idea for everyone's good, it does not mean that Muslims will deny it just because of religious differences. (Sachedina, 2001). It is duly known that the secular foundation of religious toleration is to pursue the freedom of religious practice while its element of sacredness or belief of God needs to be excluded from administration public life. For that matter, Muslim women NGO has a significant role to ensure that, the secular view of religious tolerance cannot gain footing in society. Hence, for Islam, if administration of public matter is injected with Islamic conscience, it will develop the sense of loyalty and the goodness of working in all walks (sphere) of life

g. Unity and Diversity

One of the principles of peace building that Muslim women in civil society should advocate is unity and diversity. Religion means differently to different people and Islam itself acknowledges the fact that people are different. We have different communities and cultures. Diversity is a means of knowing and respecting one another. Harmonious and peaceful co-existence means unity in diversity. Although there are differences among people, they can be united as a society and as a nation. To promote a pluralistic society, differences should not lead to disputes but should be acknowledged and accepted as part of the social landscape. This can only be realized through the application of values and norms endorsed by the Qur'an and the tradition constituted in the peace-building framework.

Conclusion

The set of values and principles identified in this write-up constitutes a framework for Islamic peace building. The role of Muslim women NGOs is to adopt these principles and frameworks in order to have significant impacts on various aspects of the Muslim community. The roles can be in the area that:

- a. contributes to solidarity among community,
- b. bridges the social and economic injustice,
- c. relieves the suffering of the poor and spare human life,
- d. empowers through participation and inclusivity,
- e. works together for equality and equity for all

f. respects the values of diversity and tolerance.

These roles and good works as well as development can only be realized if there is peace and stability. Harmony and peaceful co-existence are the natural order of the universe. For the human world to develop a peaceful, harmonious, and blissful co-existence, it is essential to observe proper social ethics and etiquettes such as acknowledgement and respect, acceptance of others as they are and to behave appropriately towards each other. Muslim women associations are part of civil society organizations that play significant role towards promoting peaceful co-existence.

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