

State Responsibilities & Civic Engagement in Constructing a Harmonious Society: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This article analyzes the responsibilities of an Islamic state in fostering a harmonious and peaceful society. Drawing upon Quranic verses, Hadith, and the practices of early Islamic leaders, it argues that establishing peace is not solely the state's duty but also a shared responsibility with individuals. The article outlines key state responsibilities, including character building through education, protecting lives and property, ensuring justice and equity, eliminating sectarianism, upholding accountability, ensuring the supremacy of law, protecting minority rights, and addressing poverty through employment. It emphasizes that a just and equitable state, grounded in Islamic principles, is crucial for achieving lasting peace and social harmony.

Keywords: *Islamic State, Peace, Harmony, Individuals, responsibilities.*

Introduction:

Peace and security are the fundamental needs of humanity on Earth. Without peace, the process of human civilization's evolution cannot continue, nor can societal life survive. Every human endeavor in research and progress thrives on peace and tranquility; if tranquility is absent, the door to intellectual and practical development will be closed. Islam, being a dynamic religion, is the greatest advocate of peace. According to the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), a prosperous life depends on two things: a peaceful society and a good economy.¹

The common perception is that the establishment of peace and order and the prevention of crime in society are solely the responsibility of the state and its institutions, and that the public has no responsibility in this regard; rather, they are complainants against them on this issue. This thinking is absolutely incorrect.

¹ Al-Baqarah: 126, Ibrāhīm: 35, Quraysh: 4

Undoubtedly, the responsibilities of the state in the context of establishing peace are an undeniable reality, but it is also impossible to ignore the fact that the responsibility to make every possible effort for the establishment of peace and order and the prevention of crime in society rests equally on the individuals of the society. This is because, according to a Hadith, "Each of you is a guardian and responsible for his charges, and each of you will be questioned about his subjects."²

Literature Review:

1. Islamic Education and Democracy: Harmonizing Faith And Civic Engagement Ahmad Reza Maulana & Co-authors
2. Fostering Harmonious Societal Constructs Through Islamic Principles by Bello Ali
3. Religion and Civic Engagement in Muslim Countries by Ani Sarkissian
4. Conception of Society and Its Characteristics from an Islamic Perspective by Hayatullah Laluddin

While the aforementioned articles offer valuable insights into Islamic principles and their relation to societal harmony, this article addresses a specific and crucial gap by directly synthesizing the responsibilities of both the Islamic state and individuals in actively constructing a peaceful society. It provides a consolidated and practically oriented perspective, drawing directly from core Islamic texts and historical precedents to clearly delineate these shared responsibilities, a focus that the existing literature, while relevant, does not explicitly and comprehensively undertake.

Research questions:

1. What are the Islamic state's duties in ensuring security, rights, and equal justice for all, including minorities?
2. How does an Islamic state address socio-economic well-being and maintain accountability for a harmonious society?

² Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth No. 893

3. How does an Islamic state foster peace through citizen development and unity in diversity?

Research Methodology:

In this research article a qualitative, library-based research methodology has been adopted. The primary sources of information include:

1. The Holy Quran: Verses relevant to governance, justice, rights, and societal harmony have been analyzed and interpreted.
2. The Hadith: Sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) pertaining to state responsibilities, leadership, and social conduct have been examined.
3. Historical Accounts: The practices and policies of early Islamic leaders, particularly the Rightly Guided Caliphs, have been explored as practical examples of implementing Islamic principles of governance.

In the Islamic perspective, what are the responsibilities of a state & individuals for the formation of a peaceful society? These are discussed below:

Character Building of Individuals through Education:

If we look at the pre-Islamic Arab society, which is termed "the Age of Ignorance" in Islamic literature, we find that not only were the ideologies corrupt, but actions had also crossed the limits of degradation, and the fundamental reason for this was ignorance. The Quran, through the first revelation "Read!",³ presented this message to the world that the pitch-black darkness of ignorance cannot be dispelled without the light of knowledge. This very purpose of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) advent was mentioned in the supplication⁴ of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) hundreds of years before his birth, and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself confirmed it by saying, "I have been sent as a teacher."⁵ In Islamic Sharia, the terms "Mumin" (believer) and "Muslim" (one who submits to God) are used for an educated Muslim. According to the Prophet Muhammad

³ Al-‘Alaq: 1

⁴ Al-Baqarah: 129

⁵ Muslim ibn Hajjāj al-Qushayrī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥadīth No. 2795

(peace be upon him), the definition of a Muslim is: "A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe."⁶ If a Muslim is not trained through knowledge, then his co-religionists cannot be safe from him, let alone those of other faiths. The Quran defines a Mumin as: "Those who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice - for them is security, and they are the [rightly] guided."⁷ This very realization has compelled the nations of the world today to consider the acquisition of education indispensable, and states deem it necessary to spend a reasonable portion of their economy on the character building of individuals through education. It is education through which every individual becomes aware of rights and duties, and thus society becomes a cradle of peace and harmony.

Protection of the Lives and Property of the Subjects:

The Holy Quran has termed the rights of the subjects as "trusts" (Amanat), as it is stated: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due..."⁸ According to all commentators, this verse commands the rulers to fulfill the rights of the people, and indeed, everyone in their sphere of authority is commanded to fulfill the rights of those under them, whether it is the President or the Prime Minister, the Army Chief or a judge of the court, or an officer of any department. According to a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), one of the signs of the approach of the Day of Judgment is: "When trust is lost, then wait for the Hour."⁹ Sayyidina Khalid bin Walid (may Allah be pleased with him) made a treaty with a people, the text of which was: "I have made a treaty with you for Jizya (tribute) and protection; so, for you is responsibility and protection. As long as we protect you, then for us is Jizya, otherwise not."¹⁰ Another example of this is when there was a fear of the retreat of Muslims in the conquered territories of Syria, Sayyidina Abu Ubaidah bin al-Jarrah¹¹ (may Allah be pleased with him)

⁶ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth No. 10

⁷ Al-An‘ām: 82

⁸ An-Nisā’: 58

⁹ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth No. 59

¹⁰ Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 3, Page 367

¹¹ Āmir ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Jarrāḥ ibn Bilāl al-Fahri al-Qurashī was a noble companion and among the ten promised Paradise (al-‘Asharah al-Mubashsharah). The Prophet (PBUH) gave him the title Amīn al-Ummah (The Trustee of the Ummah). He was born in Makkah in 584 CE (40 years before Hijrah). He was among the early converts to Islam and participated in all battles. He reached as far as the Euphrates and parts of Asia in military campaigns. Ten hadiths are narrated from him. He died in the Plague of

ordered the return of the Jizya collected from the non-Muslims to them, and the reason he stated was that we could not fulfill the promise of protection and defense that we had made to you.¹² In light of the events of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), it can be easily decided that today every individual in the state pays taxes to the government, as a result of which the state bears the responsibility of protecting the lives, property, honor, and dignity of all individuals without discrimination of religion; otherwise, there is no moral justification for taking taxes from them.

Provision of Justice and Equity:

The concept of peace and security in any society is impossible without justice and equity. There is a famous saying: "Allah helps the state that rules with justice even if it is non-Muslim, and He does not help the state that rules with injustice even if it is Muslim."¹³ In the Holy Quran, where the rulers are generally commanded to fulfill the rights of the people, emphasis is particularly placed on making decisions with justice and equity.¹⁴ Sayyidina Abu Bakr Siddiq¹⁵ (may Allah be pleased with him) highlighted the importance of justice and equity in his very first sermon: "The weak among you is strong in my eyes until I secure his right for him, and the strong among you is weak in my eyes until I take the right from him."¹⁶ For this reason, there is a consensus among the jurists of the Ummah that it is not permissible for anyone to take retribution from anyone on their own, because this authority has been given by the Sharia only to the state and the ruler.¹⁷ However,

¹² 'Amwās in 18 AH / 639 CE and was buried in Ghawr Baysan. *References*: al-Iṣābah, Vol. 2, p. 252; al-A'lam, Vol. 3, p. 252

¹³ Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, Page 153

¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū' al-Fatāwā, Vol. 28, Page 63

¹⁵ An-Nisā': 58

¹⁶ Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafah Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him) belonged to the Banu Taym clan of the Quraysh. He was the first among adult men to embrace Islam. He was the first of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. His father, mother, wife, and children were all companions (Sahabah), a unique distinction not shared by any other companion. He was born in 573 CE (51 years before Hijrah). Even during the pre-Islamic era, he neither worshipped idols nor consumed alcohol. He was chosen as the Caliph after the Prophet's passing. He died in Madinah al-Munawwarah in 13 AH / 634 CE. His caliphate lasted 2 years, 3 months, and 5 days. He narrated 142 hadiths. *References*: Usud al-Ghabah, Pg: 700, Translation: 3067; al-A'lam, Vol. 4, p. 102

¹⁷ Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 3, Page 210

¹⁸ Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, Vol. 3, Page 256

maintaining peace in society is only possible when the state fulfills its responsibility and provides redress to the oppressed. Otherwise, the oppressed, feeling deprived, will be forced to take the law into their own hands and take revenge themselves, and thus society will gradually become more corrupt. This is why the Quran has termed the implementation of the law of Qisas (retaliation) as "life."¹⁸ Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) used to take a pledge from his governors for the provision of prompt and inexpensive justice: that they would not shut their doors and be indifferent to the needs of the people, nor would they keep any gatekeepers at their entrances.¹⁹

Measures to Eliminate Sectarianism:

When the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) migrated from Makkah to Madinah, the society of Madinah generally consisted of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), with his prophetic insight and leadership wisdom, invited these diverse elements and groups with conflicting ideologies to come together on one platform for the establishment of the first Islamic state in Madinah. The sole intention was that the responsibility for the survival and integrity of this first Islamic state could be carried out by organizing everyone through mutual cooperation so that the state would face minimal internal difficulties. The Quranic basis for the Prophet's (peace be upon him) gathering of the People of the Book on one platform was this verse: "Say, 'O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is common between us and you...'"²⁰. If non-Muslims, i.e., Jews and Christians, could be invited to unity on the basis of a common ground for the sake of the stability and peace of the Islamic state, then what is the reason why bonds of unity and brotherhood cannot be established among those who believe in one God, one Prophet, one Book, one religion, and one Kaaba?

The Holy Quran has proposed an easy solution for the elimination of sectarianism, and that is "to hold firmly to the rope of Allah."²¹ According to a Hadith, when the

¹⁸ Al-Baqarah: 179

¹⁹ Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, Page 129

²⁰ Āl 'Imrān: 64

²¹ Āl 'Imrān: 103

Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was asked about the rope of Allah, he said: "The rope of Allah means the Holy Quran."²² And the Quran itself has given the example of the Companions in the same verse for the elimination of sectarianism, that they were deadly enemies of each other, but after holding fast to the rope of Allah, such a bond of brotherhood was established between them, the like of which the world cannot present.²³ If the state today, feeling its responsibility, takes steps to propagate the message of the Quran, then the resulting society will be the one that Allah has promised.

There are various reasons for sabotaging the atmosphere of peace in society, but keeping in view the ground realities, the most effective factor is "unbridled speech and rhetoric" and the undue use of pulpits and niches (minbar and mihrab), for which the state bears the responsibility of taking concrete steps. Undoubtedly, if the state, under its supervision and a regular strategy, entrusts this responsibility to qualified individuals, it will prove to be a source of encouragement, warning, and education for the public. But if unqualified people start performing this duty, today's society is a living example of its consequences.

The Government Not Considering Itself Above Accountability:

The balance of peace in any society can only be maintained where, if the state is given the authority to hold the public accountable, the powerful figures themselves do not consider themselves above accountability. Sayyidina Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), in his first sermon after the oath of allegiance to the Caliphate, addressed the people and said: "O people! I have been appointed your leader, although I am not the best among you. If I do right, then help me; and if I do wrong, then correct me. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger; and if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, then obedience to me is not obligatory upon you."²⁴ Similarly, Sayyidina Umar²⁵ (may Allah be pleased with him) once

²² Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 5, Pg: 646 – Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā, Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Ḥadīth No. 2906

²³ Āl ‘Imrān: 103

²⁴ Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 3, Page 210

²⁵ Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-‘Adawī al-Qurashī, known by the title al-Farooq, had the kunyah (patronymic) Abū Hafs. He was born in Makkah in 584 CE (40 years before Hijrah). He was the second of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. A noble companion of high status, he was courageous, bold, and valiant, among the notable young men of the Quraysh. He became Caliph in 13 AH. His sense of justice became proverbial. During his reign, lands such as Syria, Iraq, Jerusalem, Madain, Egypt, and Jazirah were conquered. The

asked: "If you see any crookedness in me, what will you do?" The people said: "If we see any crookedness in you, we will straighten it with our spears." Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "Praise be to Allah who has placed me among such people."²⁶ A person said to Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him): "Fear Allah, O Umar!" and repeated it several times. Another person wanted to reprimand him, but Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) expressed his disapproval, saying: "If you do not say such things, I will think that there is no good in you, and if I hesitate to accept it, it means there is no good in me."²⁷ During the time of the Companions and afterwards, ordinary people openly used to point out the mistakes of the Caliphs, and the Caliphs sometimes had to withdraw their decisions. If the state demonstrates this responsibility that it considers itself accountable to the public, then by doing so, society will move towards lasting peace and will never be subject to decline.

Supremacy of Law:

In the eyes of Sharia, everyone is legally equal. No one has any immunity. Reason also demands that all people should be equal in the eyes of the law. Because if it is not so, the respect for the law will be removed from the hearts of the people, and the law is the chain that binds social chaos into unity and harmony, and the law is the balance that guarantees social equilibrium. Therefore, when its respect departs from hearts, then the rule of power and lawlessness prevails in society. A society that gets trapped in the quagmire of lawlessness and becomes anarchic cannot be prevented from ruin and destruction. Therefore, respect for the law must be mandatory, and it is only possible when the law is based on equality. This is the very spirit and foundation of Islamic Sharia that we see in this Hadith: When a woman was arrested for theft, and a very close person, Sayyidina Usama bin Zaid (may Allah be pleased with him), interceded, the Prophet's (peace be upon him) face changed, and he said: "O people! Those before you were destroyed because when a noble person among them stole, they would leave him, and when a weak

Hijri calendar was introduced during his illustrious rule. He narrated 537 hadiths. He passed away in 23 AH / 644 CE. His funeral prayer was led in the mosque by Suhayb ibn Sinan al-Rūmī. *References:* Usud al-Ghabah, Pg: 914, Translation: 3831; al-A'lam, Vol. 5, p. 45

²⁶ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr, Vol. 2, Page 98

²⁷ Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, Page 22

person among them stole, they would inflict the punishment upon him. By Allah! If Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would cut off her hand."²⁸ The society of the Companions was based on the supremacy of law; no one was above the law, even if it affected their own self, their parents, or their relatives. The famous Ghassanid chief, Jabalah bin Ayham, who had accepted Islam, was circumambulating the Kaaba when the foot of a Bedouin Muslim accidentally stepped on the hem of his garment. Jabalah struck him so hard that his nose bridge was broken and bleeding. Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) ruled that either Jabalah should appease the Bedouin or be prepared for retaliation. Jabalah tried hard to get leniency, but Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said that Islam does not differentiate between a king and a pauper; its law is a law of general equality. Finally, Jabalah asked for some time and fled in the night, reverting to Christianity. However, Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) did not allow the principle of justice and equality in Islamic law to be compromised.²⁹

Even today, those states on Earth are progressing where everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. Therefore, ensuring the supremacy of law is one of the primary responsibilities of the state and is indispensable for the establishment of a peaceful society.

Protection of the Rights of Minorities:

Islam commands the establishment of justice and equality between non-Muslim minorities and Muslims in all those rights that are not related to any religious obligation or worship but are related to the order and discipline of the state, the peace of society, and the fundamental rights of citizens.³⁰ Rather, even outside the state, it directs goodwill, courtesy, good treatment, and tolerance towards those non-Muslim states that are not at war with Islam and Muslims, nor are they involved in any conspiratorial activities against them. In an Islamic state, all non-Muslim minorities and subjects will have a guarantee of protection of life, property, honor, and dignity. They will be equal to Muslims in civil liberties and fundamental rights on a human basis. Everyone will be treated equally in the eyes

²⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth No. 3475

²⁹ Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, al-Aghānī, Vol. 15, Page 111

³⁰ Al-Mumtaḥinah: 8

of the law; no discrimination will be made against anyone as a human being. Minorities will have complete freedom in their beliefs, worship, and religious rituals and practices; their beliefs and religious affairs will not be interfered with; their churches, temples, and places of worship will not be demolished. The Quran has clearly stated: "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become distinct from the wrong..."³¹. The covenant written by Sayyidina Khalid bin Walid³² (may Allah be pleased with him) for the people of Hira during the caliphate of Sayyidina Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) is a shining example of the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims in social rights: "And I stipulate that if any of the Dhimmis (protected non-Muslims) becomes incapacitated due to old age, or is afflicted by any terrestrial or celestial calamity, or if any of their wealthy becomes poor and their co-religionists start giving him charity, then Jizya is waived from all such persons. And the Bayt al-Mal (public treasury) will be responsible for their sustenance and the sustenance of their families as long as they reside in Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam)."³³

Once, during a patrol, Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) saw an elderly blind man begging at a door. He placed his hand on his back and asked which group of the People of the Book he belonged to. He replied that he was a Jew. Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) inquired how he had come to begging. The Jew said, "Due to the payment of Jizya, the need for sustenance, and the hardships of old age – three calamities." Upon hearing this, Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) took his hand, brought him home, gave him what was available, and wrote to the treasurer of the Bayt al-Mal: "Investigate the situation of this man and others like him. By Allah, it is not our justice that we take Jizya from them in their youth and leave them to the humiliation of begging in their old age. In this verse of the Holy Quran ('Indeed, [prescribed] charitable offerings are only [to be given] to the poor and the needy...'), in my opinion, the

³¹ Al-Baqarah: 256

³² Khālīd ibn al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī al-Qurashī, titled Sword of Allah, was one of the great conquerors and belonged to the nobility of the Quraysh. Until the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, he was on the side of the polytheists, involved in their oppression and battles against Muslims. He embraced Islam before the conquest of Makkah, in 7 AH. He passed away in 21 AH / 642 CE. *References*: Usud al-Ghabah, Pg: 332, Translation: 1399; al-A‘lam, Vol. 2, p. 300

³³ Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, Page 158

'poor' refers to the Muslims, and the 'needy' refers to the poor and indigent among the People of the Book."³⁴ After this, Sayyidina Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) waived the Jizya from all such people and also allocated stipends for them from the Bayt al-Mal.³⁵

Elimination of Poverty and Provision of Employment:

As mentioned earlier, the foundation of a peaceful life rests on two things: peace and economy. There is a deep connection between these two. Just as it is obligatory for the state to protect the lives, property, honor, and dignity of its subjects, it is also necessary to pave the way for the provision of employment to them so that poverty and unemployment do not increase in society. Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) once, while defining a Caliph and a ruler, said: "In an Islamic state, the Caliph and the ruler are those who decide according to the Book of Allah and show compassion to the subjects in the same way that a man shows compassion to his family."³⁶ The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever becomes a guardian over the affairs of the Muslims, then does not strive for their betterment nor seek their welfare, will not enter Paradise with them."³⁷ Abu Bakr al-Jassas, in his commentary on Surah Yusuf, states: "Allah Almighty has narrated to us the story of Sayyidina Yusuf (peace be upon him) and the incident of his preserving food items during the time of famine and distributing them among the people according to their needs, which is evidence that it is obligatory upon rulers in every era, when they fear that the people will perish due to famine, to adopt a similar method."³⁸ Today, all the states of the world agree that unemployment causes unrest and insecurity in society, and they consider creating employment opportunities as their fundamental responsibility to combat it.

In addition to the aforementioned points, the responsibilities of the state for the establishment of peace in society also include the establishment of welfare institutions, discouraging attitudes of intolerance, keeping pace with the demands

³⁴ At-Tawbah: 60

³⁵ Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf, al-Kharāj, Page 139

³⁶ Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām, Kitāb al-Amwāl, Page 13

³⁷ Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥadīth No. 237

³⁸ Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ahkām al-Qur'ān, Vol. 3, Page 227

of the modern era, combating corruption, and establishing good relations with the nations of the world.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this article has illuminated the multifaceted responsibilities of an Islamic state in the construction of a harmonious and peaceful society. Drawing upon the foundational principles of the Quran, the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the exemplary practices of early Islamic leadership, it underscores that the establishment of peace is a dual responsibility, incumbent upon both the state and its individual citizens. The analysis reveals that an Islamic state, grounded in divine guidance, plays a pivotal role in fostering a tranquil social order through a comprehensive framework of duties.