Religious Tolerance from Islamic Perspective: An Analytical Study

Dr. Vaffi Foday Sheriff
Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto – Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *One of the significant issues for sustainable peace and serenity for both individuals and society is religious tolerance which includes respect of human dignity and freedom of religion. In the misinterpretation of fundamental texts of religion, many researchers hold that Islam does not tolerate believers in the other religions. It is against this background that this paper attempts to assess religious tolerance from Islamic perspective. It start with introduction and the second part focuses on non-Muslims and issues of tolerance from Islamic perspective. The third part deals with Muslims and non-Muslims rules that guide them in a state while the fourth part of the paper consists of the application of tolerance in the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW) towards other religions. The fifth part underlines conflict management between Muslims and non-Muslims and the paper ended with conclusion. In writing this paper, descriptive method was used. Surely, if the concept of tolerance well understood, it can serve as a way of conflict resolution.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The word tolerance literally means to bear or allow while technically, it denotes willingness to accept or tolerate somebody or something, especially opinions or behaviour that you may not agree with, or people who are not like you or share with you the same religion, racial, ideology or political party.

In other words, it means respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of the world's cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human. In Arabic it denotes "*Tasamuh*". Besides, there are also other words which give similar concepts such as "*Hilm*" forbearance, or "*Afw'* pardon, forgiveness or "*Safh*" overlooking".

The attempt in this piece of writing is to look at the religious tolerance from Islamic perspective and to analyse it through Qur'anic verses, *hadith* and scholars literatures. In doing this tolerance should be at the first stage of discussion, as a basic principle of Islam. It is a religious moral duty. It does not mean "concession" or indulgence. It does not mean lack of principles, or lack of seriousness about one's principles. Sometimes it is advocated that people are tolerant of things that they do not care about. But this is not the case of Islam. Tolerance, according to Islam, does not mean that we do not believe that Islam is the final edition of divine faith and is superior to other faiths and ideologies as such. It does not mean that Muslims do not present the message of Islam to all mankind.

Furthermore, going back to the UNESCO principles on tolerance that say that consistent does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions, it means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others. Where concept of tolerance originated?

Tolerance from Islamic perspective

Islam emphasizes the establishment of equality and justice, both of these values cannot be established without some degrees of tolerance. Islam recognized from the very beginning the principle of freedom of belief or freedom of religion. It said very clearly that it is not allowed to have any coercion in the matters of faith and belief. The Qur'an says: "There is no compulsion in religion"

In the matters of religion, coercion is not permitted, and by implication one can say that in other matters of cultures and other worldly practices it is also not acceptable. In *Surat Ash-shura* Allah says to Prophet Muhammad (SAW): "If then they turn away, We have not sent you as a guard over them. Your duty is but to convey (the message)"

In another place Allah says:

Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. Your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.

In addition to the above verses Allah says in another verse:

Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger but if you turn away, He is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be on right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the message.

Understanding the contents of these verses, it appears to you that Muslims do not coerce people, the must present the message to them in the most cogent and clear way, invite them to the truth and do their best in presenting and conveying the message of Allah to humanity, but it is up to people to accept or not to accept. In this context, Allah says: "And say:

The truth is from your Lord, so whosoever wants let him believe and whosoever wants let him deny.

The question then is posed: If Allah gave choice to believe or not to believe, then why did He punish the people of Prophet Nuh, the Ad, the Thamud, the people of Prophet Lut, the people of Prophet Shu'aib and Pharaoh and his followers? The answer is in the Qur'an itself. Those people were not punished simply because of their disbelief. They were punished because they had become oppressors. They committed aggression against the righteousness, and stopped others to come to the way of Allah. There were many in the world who denied Allah, but Allah did not punish every one. Ibn Taymiyah, the outstanding Muslim scholar, said: "The states may live long in spite of their people's unbelief (*Kufr*), but they cannot live long, even they're Muslim state when their people become oppressors" Besides, the world will stay with justice and unbelief (*kufr*) but it will not last for long with injustice and Islam.

Islam teaches that fighting is only against those who fight. Allah says:

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for Allah loves not transgressors.

Islam may tolerate anything, but it teaches zero tolerance for injustice, oppression and violation of the rights of other human beings. Allah says: "And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women and children, whose cry is: "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and rise for us from your side one who will protect, and rise for us from your side one who will help!

Islam teaches tolerance on all levels: individual, groups and states. It should be a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the mechanism that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), and the rule of law. The Qur'an says very clearly: To every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not dispute with you on the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord, for you are assuredly on the Right way. If they do wrangle with you, say: Allah knows best what it is you are doing. Allah will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.

Non-Muslims and Issues of Tolerance from Islamic Perspective

Muslim jurists have classified the Non-Muslim citizens under various categories as follows:

(1) The *Dhimmis*: These are the *Ahl al-Dhimma* or those who accept the hegemony of a Muslim state treaty.
(2) The conquered people: these non-Muslims are those who fought against Muslims until they were defeated and they were overpowered. They automatically become the *Dhimmah* or responsibility of a Muslim state. They will pay a fixed amount of *jizyah* and their lives, property, honour and places of worship will be protected in lieu thereof.
(3) Those non-Muslims who cleared happen to be residing in the Muslim state as its citizens.
(4) Non-Muslims residing temporarily in a Muslim country, e.g. tourists or temporary sojourners.
(5) Resident aliens who have opted voluntary to live in a Muslim state.

Since the *Dhimmis* are under *Dhimmat* Allah, they enjoy complete religious, administrative and political freedom a right guaranteed to them in return for their loyalty and payment of a reasonable tax called *Jizyah* which will be utilized in the defense and administration of the state.

Muslims and non-Muslims rules that guide them in a state

In a Muslim state, there are rules and regulations that guide Muslims and non-Muslims that enforce their co-habilitation together among these rules is the saying of Allah:

Allah forbids you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah only forbids you with regard to those who fight you for your faith and drive you out of your homes and support others in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these, circumstances) that does wrong.

From the above Qur'anic verses, it can be noticed that Muslims are asked to deal with unbelievers kindly and justly unless they are rampant and out to destroy Muslims and their faith as was shown by the example of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the treaties of *Hudaibiyah* in Medina.

Moreover, as far as the Christians and Jews are concerned, they have been given a special position in the Qur'an since their religions were originally based on their heavenly books like Torah and *Injil* (Bible). The Qur'an says in respect of *Ahl al-Kitab*,

And dispute you not with the people of the Book except with means better than were disputation) unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury), but say: "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you, our Allah and your God is one and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)".

In this context, what are the fundamental rights of non-Muslims in Muslim state?
There are two fundamental rights of non-Muslims in a Muslim state. They are:
(1) Their protection from all external threats.
(2) Their protection from all internal tyranny and persecution.

The first kind of protection is the same as in the case of Muslims. The head of state and those in authority are bound to look after the interest of all citizens using all the force at their command. The *Malikite* scholar Imam al-Qurafi quoted the statement of Ibn Hazm from his book *Maratib al-Ijma*: "If enemies at war come to our country aiming at certain *Dhimmi*, it is essential for us that we come out to fight them with all our might and weapons since he is under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. If we did anything less than this, it means we have failed in our agreement for protection"

Application of Tolerance in Lifetime of the Prophet (SAW) Towards Other Religions

Reading carefully the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), one can notice that he tolerated the existence of other religions during his lifetime; he used to do justice according to the law to which the complainant belonged. For instance, once a Christian of the Banu Quraiza tribe was killed by a Christian of the Banu Nazir tribe. In a complaint before the Prophet (SAW), he enforced the law of the Torah – life for life. Before his death, the Prophet (SAW) announced publicly, if I owe anything to anybody, he may claim it. If I offended anybody, he may take revenge." In response, a man named Sarf claimed some *dirhams*. They were at once paid to him. Besides, Sakhar was a Muslim who accepted Islam after Ta'if was conquered. He was the chief of his tribe. Once the infidel Mugirah complained to the Prophet (SAW) that Sakhar had kept his aunt detained with him, he at once ordered Sakhar to handover Mugirah's aunt to him. In addition to this, in disputes between the Jews, Muslims and other tribes, it's reported that the Prophet (SAW) was the final court of Appeal.

To apply concrete tolerance towards other religion is to accord to non-Muslim citizens protection from internal high-handedness, persecution, tyranny and injustice. The Muslim citizens are duty bound to spare their hands and tongues from hurting the non-Muslim citizens.

Moreover, there are a number of *Ahadith* of the Prophet (SAW) pointed out as sign of conflict management between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Conflict Management Between Muslims and Non-Muslims

To manage the misunderstanding that will occur between Muslims and Christians, Prophet (SAW) did not allow any non – Muslims to hurt Muslims in any way, at the same time Prophet (SAW) warn Muslims against any hardness towards the non-Muslim citizens.

"من ظلم معاهدا أو انتقصه حقا أو كلفه فوق طاقته أو أخذ منه شيئا بغير طيب نفس منه، فأنا حجيجه يوم القيامة"

Whoever persecuted a Dhimmi or usurps or took work from him with evil intentions, I shall be a complainant against him on the Day of Resurrection

In another tradition Prophet says:
"من آذى ذميا فأنا خصمه، ومن كنت خصمه خاصمته يوم القيامة"

Whoever hurts a Dhimmi, I shall be his complainant, and for whosoever I am a complainant, I shall ask for his right on the Day of Resurrection

In case of war or conflict that will be happened in the state, Prophet (SAW) says:
And verily the Jews shall bear their expenses (of war) and the Muslims shall their expenses and verily there shall be aid between them as against those who fight the parties (*ahl*) to this document (*sahifah*), and there shall be sincere counsel and well wishing between them and there shall be fulfillment of (pledge) and not violation.

And if they (i.e. the Jews) are invited to a peace to participate in and to adhere to it, the same shall be incumbent upon the Believers in their favour excepting one who fights for the cause of religion

And verily those who will obey us from among the Jews will have help and equality neither shall they be oppressed nor shall any help be given against them.

Something that is interesting to point out here is that "the ethical basis is natural part to human creation because it is with the help of this innate ability, the primordial nature (*fitra*) put by Allah in all human beings that humanity acquires the ability to deal with each other faithfulness and equity. This moral ability allows for the development of a "global ethic" that can provide the pluralistic basis for regulating inter-religious relations among peoples of diverse spiritual commitment to enable them to build the fundamental consensus relating ethical values and goals.

The Qur'an presents religious pluralism as a divine mystery that must be accepted as a given tool to allow for smooth inter-communal relations in the public square. It moreover, presents its theology of the "other" in the form of an ethical model in developing a workable for an ideal society. It is believed, that the unique characteristic of Islam is its conviction that belief in the oneness of Allah unites the Muslim community with entire humanity, because Allah is the Creator of all humans irrespective of their affiliation to different faith communities. The Qur'an declares that on the Day of Judgment all human beings will be judged, regardless of their membership in a specific community, about their moral performance as citizens of the world community. In this respect, discussion on tolerance can be seen in the following classifications:

- Tolerance between family members such as husband and wife, between parents and children, between siblings, etc.
- Tolerance between the members of the community: tolerance in views and opinions, tolerance between the *Madhahib* Islamic-Justice schools).
- Tolerance between Muslims and the people of the faiths (inter-faith relations, dialogue and cooperation.)

Ummatun Wahidatun (One Nation Concept)

Looking deeply in the constitution written by the Prophet (SAW), you can notice that all inhabitants of Medina either Muslims or non-Muslims such as Jews and Christians were one nation. In fact, all were considered citizens of Medina society regardless of religion, race or ancestry. In his constitution he says: "And verily this prescript (*Kitab*) shall not protect any oppressor or violator of pledge, and verily whoever goes out (on military expedition) shall have security, and whoever stays in Medinah shall have security, except one who commits oppression and violation of the pledge that means law and rules above everybody men and women in the city.

II.   CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis of issues of tolerance, the paper can be concluded by saying that tolerance is the result of beautiful traits of love and compassion for other people in society. It's an essence of social relations that was practiced by the Prophet (SAW) and his companions. Furthermore, the issues of tolerance is not static but dynamic which suppose to be a continuous process and everyday exercise among Muslims themselves and the people of other faiths in the light of Islamic principles laid down by the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW).

END NOTES AND REFERENCES
[1].   Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Oxford University Press, sixth edition, 1261
[2].   Kamel Ahmad Khan, *The Concept of Tolerance in Islam*. See on http://www.milligazette.com/news/1761-the-concept-of-tolerance-in-islam, visited on 28.01,2014
[3].   Dr, Ibrahim Anis, *Mu'jamul Wasit*, p. 473.
[4].   Kamel Ahmad Khan, op.cit.
[5].   Solemnly adopted by acclamation on 16 November 1995 at the twenty-eighth session of the UNESCO General Conference. Retrieved on 05/04/2014 at http://www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/124-129.HTM#one
[6].   Qur'an 2: 256.
[7].   Qur'an 42: 48.
[8].   Qur'an 16: 125.
[9].   Qur'an 24: 54.
[10].   Qur'an 16: 29.
[11].   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Hesbah*, p. 4, see more *Majmu'ul Fatawi Li Ibn Taymiyyah*, vol. 28. P. 146.
[12].   Qur'an 2: 190.
[13].   Qur'an 4: 75.
[14].   Qur'an 22, 67-69.
[15].   Doi Abdurrahman, Shariah, The Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 1404 (AH), p. 427.
[16].   See Abu Zahrah, Muhammad, *Al-Jarimah wal uqubah fil-Fiqh al-Islami*, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, (ND), p. 189.
[17].   Qur'an 60: 8-9.
[18].   See more explanations in Musnad Ahmad, Bukhari and Muslim. Also read some details in Maududis Tafhim al-Qur'an (Urdu), Delhi, 1975, pp. 433-434.
[19].   Qur'an 29: 46.
[20].   Imam al-Qarafi, Shihab al-Din Abul-Abbas Ahmad bin Idris al-Malik, Al-Furuq, Cairo 1346 AH. Vol. 3, pp 14-15.

[21].   Abdulrahman I. Doi, Ibid, p. 433.
[22].   Ibid.
[23].   Ibid.
[24].   Ibid.
[25].   See Al-Qardawi, Yusuf, Ghayr al-Muslimin fi al-Mujtama' al-Islami, Cairo, 1977, p. 10-11.
[26].   Abu Daud and Baihaqi, see Al-Sunan al-Kubrah, Vol. 5, p. 205. narrated by al-Katib with authentic isnad.
[27].   Al-'Ayni, Sharh Abi Dawud, Bab haqqu Assa'il, Hadith No 1044,
[28].   The first written constitution in the world (An important Document of the Time of the Noble Prophet (SAW) Translated from Arabic into English Muhammad Hamudullah, 3rd Revised Edition 1394 ///ah/1975, Luzac & Company Ltd, 46, Great Britain Russell Street, London, Ch. 37/a. p. 51.
[29].   Ibid, Ch. 45/a, p. 53.
[30].   Ibid. ch. 16, p. 46.
[31].   See Hans Kung and Kail-Joseph Kuschell (London: SCM Press, 1993) p. 21.
[32].   Abdulaziz Sachedina, The Qur'an on Religious pluralism, The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding: History and International Affairs, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057, 1999, p. 12.
[33].   Ibid, p. 11.
[34].   Muzamil H. Siddiq, Ibid.
[35].   i. Ibid. ch 16., p. 46.