

When Muslims Speak Like Islamophobes

News:

A worrying development has emerged in Malaysia's debate over Rohingya refugees. As criticism of the refugee community intensifies, many comments on social media increasingly resemble the rhetoric long used by Islamophobes in Europe and America. Refugees are collectively portrayed as criminals, economic burdens and threats to society, prompting concerns that legitimate public grievances are giving way to prejudice and collective condemnation.

Comment:

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of today's debate is not the criticism itself, but the language being used. For decades, Muslims condemned Islamophobia whenever politicians and media in Europe and America portrayed Muslims as criminals, extremists or burdens on society. We rejected such narratives because they judged entire communities by the actions of a few. Yet today, many Muslims have begun employing remarkably similar arguments against the Rohingya.

The labels have changed, but the reasoning remains the same.

This does not mean public concerns should be ignored. Every state has a duty to preserve security, uphold the law and protect its citizens. Crimes committed by refugees remain crimes and must be dealt with accordingly. Islam does not excuse wrongdoing simply because the offender belongs to a persecuted community. However, justice requires us to distinguish between individual misconduct and collective condemnation. More importantly, many of the problems associated with refugee communities are symptoms rather than the disease itself.

The Rohingya did not choose to become stateless. They fled persecution, only to remain trapped in legal uncertainty, unable to return home and unable to build stable lives elsewhere. Years without recognized legal status, education or stable employment inevitably create social problems. Condemning refugees without addressing these realities is to mistake the symptom for the cause.

Islam offers a different perspective. Allah (swt) has honoured all the children of Adam, while the Prophet (saw) described the believers as one body, sharing one another's suffering. These are not merely moral ideals but principles that should shape society and governance. History demonstrates this clearly when during the Crusades, Muslims displaced by war found refuge throughout Muslim lands. Following the fall of Granada, the Uthmani Caliphate welcomed Andalusian Muslims, providing protection, livelihoods and integration into society. Refugees were not viewed as permanent burdens but as members of one Ummah whose welfare was the responsibility of a single political authority.

Within today's reality, governments should establish clearer policies on refugee documentation, employment, education and healthcare while firmly maintaining law and order. Such measures are necessary to reduce hardship and social tension. However, one should recognize that these remain temporary remedies. The more fundamental question is why Muslims continue to become refugees. Palestine, Syria, Myanmar and Sudan continue to produce displaced Muslims because the Ummah remains politically fragmented. Each refugee crisis is treated as the responsibility of neighbouring states rather than the collective responsibility of the Ummah.

The recurring refugee crises therefore expose a deeper political disease. As long as Muslims remain divided into competing nation-states, humanitarian tragedies will continue to recur, and discussions will remain confined to managing their consequences.

The long-term solution lies in restoring the political unity of the Ummah under the Khilafah 'ala Minhaj al-Nubuwwah (Caliphate in the method of the Prophethood). Islamic history demonstrates that such leadership did not merely provide humanitarian relief after crises occurred; it possessed the political authority and strength to protect Muslim lands, safeguard the Ummah and prevent generations of Muslims from becoming refugees.

The Rohingya issue is therefore more than a refugee question. It is a mirror reflecting the condition of today's Ummah. Until we address not only how refugees should be treated, but also why Muslims continue to become refugees, we will merely treat the symptoms while leaving the real problem untouched.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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