



Focus on Islam

PUBLIC DIALOGUE BRIEF: Religion, Politics and National Identity:

Makerere University

23 February, 2015 | 1430-1700

This Public Dialogue was hosted by the School of Law at Makerere University and was opened by a lead presentation by Imam Imaamu Kasozi in which he sought to elaborate the dignity with which Islam treats humanity and human life in general.

Imam Kasozi stated The concept of Human Dignity is broad. It embraces a variety of values which vary in perception from one cultural and legal tradition to another and its application can change with time and developments in science and technology.

He took exception to the narrative that seeks to portray Islam as an inherently violent and extremist faith tradition arguing that the Holy Scriptures of the Qur'an present incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. He added that extremism is a function of socio-political and economic exclusion which drives those on the fringes of society (especially the youth) into indulging in such illicit activity.

Towards remedying this situation, the revered Imam called for a comprehensive approach towards inclusion of all constituent parts of society insofar as social amenities (healthcare, justice, education and social security) are concerned. With reference to Uganda, Imam Kasozi stated that serious attention ought to be paid as well to the uncertainty that has engulfed the Ugandan political arena which was accelerated by the spate of killings of Muslim clerics and general lawlessness in the last quarter of 2014 and first two months of 2015.

He implored those in academic circles, the media and the broader civil society to pay special attention to these developments because they have a bearing to and will have an effect on the path towards the general elections due in 2016.

The discussant, Prof Abbas Kiyimba of the Department of Literature at Makerere University re-emphasised the observations by Imam Kasozi on the socioeconomic and political exclusion of Muslims from the broader polity and co-optation of a few leaders in the Islamic fraternity for parochial objectives and political mileage.

Through close interaction with the basic Islamic sources of Qur'an and hadith (sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)), Prof Kiyimba showed that The position of humankind as a beloved creation of Allah, his relationship with both Allah and fellow humans, as well as the clearly laid out lists of likes and dislikes of Allah, all impose upon him duties and obligations if he is to merit the position of dignity that he occupies before the Almighty.

Islam places a lot of emphasis on spirituality and ethics, and on the importance of the revealed text in the human conception of the dignity of humankind. It therefore clearly stresses the duties and respect for the rights of everybody, from the most advantaged to the least advantaged. In order to achieve and enforce this, the leaders charged with authority must be mindful of their spiritual destiny. That is, failure to uphold the human dignity and rights of the subjects is viewed as



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transgression in the face of the Creator for which they will be answerable. This is the major difference between Islam and Western social and legal systems whose conception of rights is purely secular, and lays more emphasis on the claiming of rights by the individual, sometimes to the exclusion of the mechanism for their enforcement.

An interactive open floor session was conducted as the final part of the dialogue; one outstanding question that was dwelt upon by panelists in response to the same was one regarding the inquiry: “What do you Muslims want?” The response to this was a reiteration of the importance of socioeconomic and political inclusion of all classes, denominations and sections of society in development.

Remarkably, this dialogue, courtesy of a live internet feed was able to host participants who were not physically present at the venue. This was done via Facebook and significantly improved the Fellowship’s online footprint. The online discussion continued even after the event had been closed.

The Director HURIPEC expressed her gratitude to the panelists and the audience for ensuring a lively event; she brought the dialogue to a close at 5.05PM.