



## ADVANCED SEMINAR BRIEF: Islam as an Instrument of Social Change

Convened with Uganda Muslim Association, Wakiso District | Kiina Conference Hall  
15 April, 2015 | 1000-1430

### INTRODUCTION

This Advanced Seminar on “Islam as an Instrument of Social Change” was convened by the Religion, Rights and Peace Fellowship (RRPF) of the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC), School of Law-Makerere University in conjunction with the leadership of the Muslim Association of Wakiso District.

The Seminar featured expositions by Mr. Asuman Basalirwa, President of the Justice Forum (JEEMA) and Imam Ssentongo who responded to the main paper presentation. Both discussions were followed by open plenary which provided a platform for the two hundred-strong audience to participate in the matters arising out of the day’s theme for discussion.

The issues arising, as shall be articulated in detail in the following pages of this brief included among others gender equity in Islam, philosophical inquiries into charity (alms giving), the nature and form of Islamic education, the concept of justice as juxtaposed with the tenets of Sharia Law.

### MR ASUMAN BASALIRWA, ESQ., Main Presenter

In his presentation, Mr Basalirwa acknowledged HURIPEC for organizing this most timely dialogue and called for more discussions on this matter and increased sensitization about the true nature of Islam.

He led off by stating that the answers that the topic seeks rest in the definition of Islam: “man’s total submission to the will of Allah”. He added that Islam, beyond the fact that it is a religious faith tradition is also a system, a culture and also a philosophy.

Social transformation springs from a number of Islamic tenets:

- i) Peace: this tenet perforce militates against the notion that Islam is synonymous with terrorism and related evils. He stated that those who commit atrocities in the name of Islam are not Muslims anymore than Joseph Kony of the insurgent Lord’s



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- Resistance Army can lay claim to being a true follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ simply because his name is “Joseph”.
- ii) Love: this, Basalirwa explained, is the most subtle but powerful blessing that God has bestowed upon us. This love is eternal and must be shared without discrimination against any faiths.



The Advanced Seminar attracted the top leadership of the Islamic Community in Wakiso District; on the right hand side of Hajj Hamid Sentongo is JEEMA party president Asuman Basalirwa, Esq.

- iii) Hard work: Islam implores its follower faithful to shun sloth/laziness and embrace hard work. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) called upon the people to always engage in constructive work/ventures after praying. In relation to the giving of alms (Zakaat), it is for this reason that Allah prefers the hand that gives to the one that receives.
- iv) Equality: All persons are equal before and under the law in Islam. Perceived distinctions based on gender are there for social order and harmony.
- v) Knowledge: Mr Basalirwa affirmed this point arguing that those who do not engage in intellectual adventure and scholarly inquiry cannot purport to harness Islam as a



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- tool for social change. To that end, knowledge that exceeds one's professional, geographical or other experiences is a prerequisite to social change.
- vi) Justice: As with equity, he noted that there must be fairness, equity and respect for institutional processes towards dispute resolution.
  - vii) Cleanliness (and Health): He noted that cleanliness is a fundamental aspect of Islam and an engine for social change.
  - viii) Time-keeping: he stated that the biggest but finite resource that Allah has granted humanity is time, yet it is the most abused. He briefly hinted on the fact that all religious activities and rituals are also hallmarks of social change because of the transformatory potential they possess.

In the second part of his paper, Basalirwa stated that the family, as a basis of society, is a fundamental unit of social organization. It is for this reason that Islam vehemently opposes homosexuality and prescribes the death penalty for the same. The soundest foundation for society is the family in which spiritual and material happiness flow.

He concluded by stating that responsibility/social obligations towards others (those with whom we live) is something that must be actualized in our daily lives in pursuit of social change; this, because it is the example that guides the rest of society thereby engendering the transformation that we seek.

### **IMAM (MR.) SSENTONGO HAMID, Discussant**

He began by reiterating the main presenter's statement about time and restated that it is indeed the most valuable resource anyone can have. He called upon the audience to be grateful to Allah by using time tenaciously, and singled out punctuality as a virtue. Time, once used, cannot be recovered; it cannot be rewarded, reversed, stopped, stored or reproduced. It is a phenomenon that must be treated by mankind with the reverence it deserves.

Imam Sentongo proceeded to state that Islam is without dispute a religion that aspires for peace. It cherishes the value of hard work and in equal measure, holds the practice of worship in esteem.



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The youth (able-bodied and energetic) ought to work hard in pursuit of a decent quality of life. Indeed, blessed is the hand that gives, it is preferred over the one that receives.

A philosophical debate ensued between teachers of Islam and the contention was regarding the question on “who between a poor person and a healthy person is preferable to Allah”? to which he responded that the wealthy person is more preferable because of their ability to commit/deploy private resources in seeking the will of Allah and furthering the cause of Allah. Additionally, the wealthy, in addition to their observance of Islamic teachings, support the cause of Allah. It is therefore better to work hard and aspire towards wealth so that one partakes of the benefits that proceed from being in total submission to Allah.

Imam Sentongo then introduced the idea of sacrifice as a pertinent matter, expected from all Muslims regardless of social status. He advised that sacrifice in philanthropic lenses is a guarantee for social stability. Offering alms (Zakaat) is a means of protecting and ensuring the long term existence of one’s wealth.

Medical practitioners only diagnose and prescribe cures to disease; treatment/therapy and/or healing are the preserve of Allah.



Some of the over two hundred participants at the Advanced Seminar on Islam as an Instrument for Social Change



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### Equality of Mankind

The diversity of mankind in cultural, socioeconomic and political terms was a deliberate creation by God/Allah as a way of fostering coexistence, understanding and tolerance.

Reverence for Allah is not analogous to fear; respect and observance of his instructions is the respect Allah requires of humanity.

Every human being has a position in the hierarchy of their families and societies – this is a confirmation of the hierarchy abided by spiritual beings.

### Justice

Equal treatment of all human beings regardless of their social class i.e. wife/husband, children/parents, domestic helper/home owner. In this regard, he stated social values as contained in Suraat 17, 19 and 107 of the Holy Qur'an. He stated that justice means and includes speaking truth to power.

In conclusion, Ibaada (tenets of Islam) cannot be done unless someone fully appreciates the foregoing value and belief system as comprised by the (above) constituent components thereof.

## OPEN PLENARY

There was a request for more of these activities in the rural areas of respective religious communities so as to engender social change;

Notably, there was a call by a number of female participants for gender-specific seminars to be organized so that they can engage freely on matters pertaining to human rights, gender, sexuality and religion.

It was resolved to regularize these Seminars within the Wakiso Muslim Community;

Leadership training and mentorship, retirement benefits and remuneration for leaders as well as the welfare of incumbent leaders and the faithful were emphasized as areas of interest within the Muslim community in Wakiso.



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Islam should or ought to have a position on the social ills that are perpetrated by their own (such as defilement, under-age marriages etc) so that no generalizations are made about the religion.

If the value system that constitutes the Qur'an had been understood by all people (community), there would be a much more stable society that engenders progress.

It is important that the top leadership of society is known by the people they lead; the led must be accustomed to their leaders.

All the values that have been impressed upon the participants, Imam Sentongo concluded, are best inculcated at the family level as the basic unit of society in pursuit of social change.

The Advanced Seminar was exceedingly appreciated by many participants who requested for similar exercises to be convened successively. It was brought to a close at 2.30PM by the session chair, Hajj Ssessanga Edrisa.