

## The Prophet (p) Joined and Endorsed a Civil Society Organization (*Hilf al-Fudul*)

During the pre-Islamic (*Jahiliyyah*) period in Mecca and within the legal and administrative system of the “*Jahiliyyah* society” of Mecca, the Prophet (p) joined a group known as the *Hilf al-Fudul* (League of the Virtuous).<sup>1</sup> This was a group of upright individuals in Mecca who took it upon themselves to protect the rights of any victim of oppression in Mecca, whether they were visitors or citizens. Even after Islam was well-established in Medina, the Prophet (p) recounted his involvement with the *Hilf al-Fudul*, and according to Talha bin Abdullah, the Prophet (p) said that, *“If he was to be invited again to join such a group now in the time of Islam, he would respond and join them.”*<sup>2</sup> According to Ibn Hisham, *“They (members of Hilf al-Fudul) promised and pledged that they would not find any oppressed person among their people or among anyone else who entered Mecca except that they would support him. They would stand against whoever oppressed him until the rights of the oppressed were returned.”*<sup>3</sup> The Prophet (p) was reported by Ibn Abbas to have said, *“Every pact (or treaty) from the time of Ignorance (Jahiliyyah) is definitely further strengthened and affirmed by Islam.”*<sup>4</sup>

### Supporting Texts

*“Cooperate in righteousness and piety, and do not cooperate in sin and aggression.”* (Qur’an 5:20)

*“And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.”* (Qur’an 3:104)

*“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Adil Salahi, *Muhammad, Man and Prophet: A Complete Study of the Life of the Prophet of Islam*, The Islamic Foundation, Markfield, UK, 2002, pp.40-41, pp. 495-530; Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 20-22.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Baihaqi, *Sunan Al-Kubra*, hadith no.12114; *Al-Dala’il fi Gharib al-Hadith*, hadith no. 243

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Hisham, *Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol.1, p.123; *Al-Dala’il fi Gharib al-Hadith*, hadith no.243

<sup>4</sup> *Musnad Ahmad*, hadith no.2904. Literally, the hadith reads, *“Every pact from the Time of Ignorance (Jahiliyyah) is not increased by Islam except in strength and affirmation.”*

*Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.” (Qur’an 9:71)*

*“So fear Allah as much as you are able, and listen and obey and spend [in the way of Allah]; it is better for your selves. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful.” (Qur’an 64:16)*

*“And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.” (Qur’an 5:48)*

The Prophet (p) said, *“The best among you (as to their human and moral qualities) during the era before Islam (jahiliyyah) are the best in Islam, provided they understand it (Islam).”*<sup>5</sup>

The Prophet (p) also said that, *“Whoever amongst you sees an evil act or deed should change it with his hand. If he is not able, then he should change it with his tongue. But if he is not able to, then with his heart. And that is the weakest of faith.”*<sup>6</sup>

## **Comments**

Mahdi Rizq-Allah Ahmad commented thus, *“If people of Jahiliyyah have resisted oppression based on their natural instinct, Muslims are then more expected to resist it with their beliefs because Islam encourages justice. This is why seeing the Prophet (p) emphasizing the importance of that*

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<sup>5</sup>*Sahih Bukhari*, hadith no.3374; *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.6615.

<sup>6</sup>*Sahih Muslim*, hadith no. 78; *Ibn Majah*, hadith no.4013.

*character is not a surprise. This is because the content of Hilf al-Fudul is one of the core values that Islam calls for.....”<sup>7</sup>*

Commenting on the fact that Islam and Muslims recognize and acknowledge the good *urf* (culture) in others even if they are non-Muslims, Umar Faruq Abdullah says, “The Prophet (p) cultivated openness and objectivity toward others — this was also part of his lesson to Umar bin Al-Khattab - and such openness enabled his Companions to acknowledge the good in other cultures even when, as was the case with the Byzantine Christians (al-Rum), they were not only hostile to the rise of Islamic power on their southern flank but constituted Islam’s most formidable enemy. When it was related to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas - a Companion of the Prophet (p) and victorious commander in the Byzantine wars - that the Prophet (p) had prophesied that al-Rum (specifically the Byzantines, but understood in this context as a general reference to Europeans), would predominate at the end of time, ‘Amr responded to his informer: *“If, then, you have related this honestly, know that they have four excellent qualities. They are the most forbearing of people in times of discord. They are the quickest of people to recover from calamity. They are the most likely of people to renew an attack after retreat. And they are the best of people toward the poor, the orphan, and the weak.”* ‘Amr then added: *“And they have a fifth attribute which is both beautiful and excellent: They are the best of people in checking the oppression of kings.”*<sup>8</sup>

‘Amr drew attention to those European cultural traits which he knew and regarded as both compatible with Islam’s ethos and universally desirable as human qualities. His response demonstrates his understanding that the future prominence of Westerners would be an outgrowth of their exceptional cultural traits, which his mind immediately began to search out after hearing Prophet Muhammad’s (p) prophecy. Four came at once to his mind, and the fifth (“they are the best of people in checking the oppression of kings”) occurred as an afterthought but was clearly regarded among the most important (it was viewed as “beautiful and excellent”).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mahdi Rizq-Allah Ahmad, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah fi Dao’ al-Masadir al-Asliyyah*, Markaz al-Malik Faisal li al-Buhuth wa al-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah, Saudi Arabia, 1992, p.132.

<sup>8</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, vol.8, p.176, hadith no.7461.

<sup>9</sup> Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, *Islam and the Cultural Imperative*, An-Nawawi Foundation Paper, 2004, p.5.

## Implications and Lessons

Muslims, in whatever situation they find themselves, whether as a minority or a majority, and whether they have political influence or not, are expected to enjoin right and forbid wrong (as instructed by the Qur'an 3:104), to the best of their abilities (Qur'an 64:16), within the existing societal restrictions.<sup>10</sup>

This narrative also indicates that Muslims must always have those amongst them who defend the legal rights of others irrespective of their faith. This is a “collective social obligation” (*fard kifayah*) required of Muslims. They should protect and assist victims of abuse and injustice even in societies where Islamic law has little or no jurisdiction. This has been done successfully through advocacy and activism, within the existing legal system to make contributions to society and/or also support social, economic, legal and political reforms in many countries across the world.

Tariq Ramadan in his book *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* draws three lessons from this incident. *“First, the Prophet (p) acknowledged the validity of a principle of justice and defence of the oppressed stipulated in a pact of the pre-Islamic era. Secondly, the Prophet’s statement (according to Talha above) denies the trend of thought that a pledge can be ethically valid for Muslims only if it is of a strictly Islamic nature and/or if it is established between Muslims. The third consequence of this narration is that Islam is a message of justice that entails resisting oppression and protection of the dignity of the poor, and Muslims must recognize the moral value of a law or contract stipulating this requirement, whoever its authors and whatever the society, Muslim or not.”*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For further reading, see Adil Salahi, *Muhammad, Man and Prophet: A Complete Study of the Life of the Prophet of Islam*, The Islamic Foundation, Markfield, UK, 2002, p.40 – 41.

<sup>11</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, p.20 – 22.

This narrative therefore counters the argument of those who say that Muslims are not expected to form alliances, partnerships and organizations which cooperate with non-Muslims for the attainment of common good.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the following maxims in light of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah:
  - The general principle conferring validity of contracts is the consent of both parties, and the effective terms and conditions are what they agreed.
  - A specific harm is tolerated to ward off a general harm.
  - Necessities render the prohibited permissible.
  - Need, general or specific, is treated like necessity.
  - Averting harm takes precedence over achieving benefit.
  - Private harm is to be borne in order to ward off public harm.
  - The lesser evil is preferred over the greater evil.
  - The greater harm is to be removed by the lesser harm.
  - Acts of those with authority over people must take into account the interests of the people.
2. The *Sahifah* takes an explicit stand for justice. Highlight the term(s) which clearly states this position.
3. It is sometimes argued that it is wrong for Muslims to explicitly recognise the rights of other faiths, especially where Muslims are in authority. Discuss this in light of the *Sahifah*.
4. It is permissible for non-Muslims to be considered as part of the same community as Muslims. Discuss.
5. Consider your local community (or state, country, region, continent, earth) and features, people and their interests needs and aspirations. In what ways/for what purposes/on

what basis could you cooperate/form alliances with the non-Muslims? Give practically applicable suggestions.

6. Being an active member of the community is part of being a good Muslim, even if the community is dominated by non-Muslims. Discuss.