



***The Duties of an Imam  
in Minority Countries***

***Dr Essam al-Bashir***





Imam Institute for Training and Development Publications (1)

# **The Duties of an Imam in Minority Countries**

*Dr Essam al-Bashir*

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# *Preface*

**Praise be to Allah, and salutations and peace upon our Prophet, his family, companions, and those who follow him.**

**We are grateful that Allah honoured us by allowing us to host a conference for imams from Europe and Latin America in the bustling city of Istanbul on November the 10th till the 13th, 2023. Among Allah's blessings was the presence of the esteemed scholar, Professor Dr Essam Ahmed Al-Bashir. His eloquent words during the closing ceremony addressed the responsibilities of imams in minority countries. Due to its importance, the institution decided to transcribe and refine it for publication after discussion with Dr Bashir. As we present the transcription in this booklet, we pray that Allah rewards all those who contributed to creating it with what is best, and that it proves beneficial for imams and preachers wherever they may be. Our final supplication is that all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds.**

**Imam Foundation for Training and Development,  
United Kingdom, Monday, January 22, 2024.**



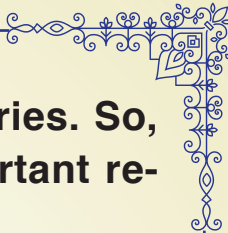
***In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious,  
the Most Merciful***

**Praise be to Allah, by whose grace righteous deeds are completed, and blessings and peace upon the Prophet, a mercy to the worlds, the bearer of good tidings and a warner, the illuminating lantern. May the best prayers and perfect peace be upon him.**

***The Word ‘Imam’***

**The Imam is the one who leads and guides the people. It has been said, ‘If you want to be my Imam, then be in front of me’. This word is mentioned as one of the meanings of the term ‘Ummah’ in the Quran, where it refers to a leader, “Indeed, Ibrahim was an ummah (leader)” (Surah Al-Nahl: 120). Meaning that he embodied the qualities of goodness and served as an example.**

**Historically, scholars categorised roles based on the circumstances they lived in. Contemporary scholars assert that today’s world is either the land of a covenant or the land of da’wah,**



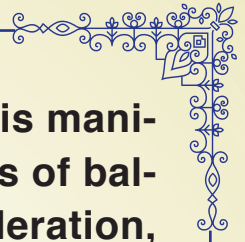
**with the exception of occupied territories. So, in your countries, you have two important responsibilities.**

**The first involves preserving the Islamic identity, creed, values, and objectives of life.**

**The second task is to fulfil the requirements of righteous citizenship in the countries where you reside. This entails preserving your identity and religious belonging to the Muslim Ummah. It includes safeguarding your creed, observing religious rituals, upholding moral values, and promoting the well-being of families and communities in relationships and transactions.**

**May Allah grant success in fulfilling these tasks, and all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds.**

**In preserving this, you can undertake two approaches. The intellectual manifestation through invitation and guidance, or the practical manifestation through behaviour and exemplification. It is essential that both the**

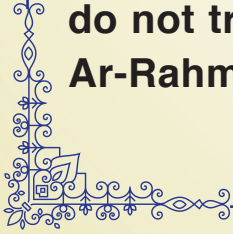


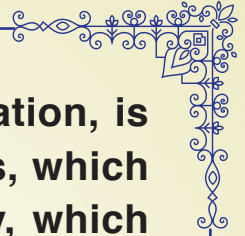
**theoretical and practical aspects of this manifestation are founded on the principles of balance, fairness, and moderation. Moderation, as indicated in the Quran and the Prophet's tradition, revolves around three meanings:**

**1. The first meaning is moderation or justice, as mentioned in the Quran, "The moderate one among them said." (Surah Al-Qalam: 28), meaning the most just among them. Also, "And thus We have made you a moderate community." (Surah Al-Baqarah: 143). Imam Al-Bukhari explained this as being just.**

**2. The second meaning is goodness; the Prophet ﷺ was the best among the Arabs by lineage, indicating its goodness.**

**3. The third meaning is a praiseworthy balance that prevents an individual from falling victim to extremism or negligence, excessiveness or deficiency, tyranny or failure, and rigidity or laxity. As in "And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance. That you do not transgress within the balance." (Surah Ar-Rahmān: 7-8).**



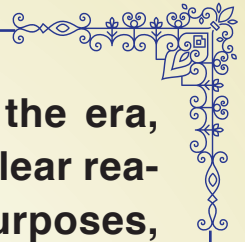


**This balance, the balance of moderation, is encompassed by two aspects. Excess, which is exceeding the limit, and deficiency, which is falling short of it. Allah states, “Do not recite your prayers too loudly or silently, but seek a path between.” (Al-Isra: 110). The path mentioned here is the balance between silence and loudness. The Quran also states, “And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but hold a just balance between those extremes.” (Al-Furqān: 67). Moderation is achieved by avoiding both extravagance and undue restraint. And Allah states, “And do not make your hand [as] chained to your neck or extend it completely.” (Quran 17:29). The balance is found between restraint and extension.**

**These three meanings, if we intend to express them methodologically both theoretically and practically in the realm of awareness, perception, understanding, and practice, it can be summarised with a few comprehensive words. It is to present Islam as a guiding system for every time, place, and humanity, connected to**







**reality, explained in the language of the era, synthesising authentic sources with clear reasoning, preserving objectives and purposes, evolving in means and mechanisms, remaining firm in principles and fundamentals, flexible in branches and details, welcoming every beneficial old and benefiting from every righteous new. It is open to civilisations without assimilation, respecting uniqueness without isolation, seeking wisdom from any vessel it emerges from, working towards strengthening the human, religious, and civilisational commonalities. It is tied to the original, connected to the contemporary, rooted in the essence of the Quran and the Sunnah, co-existing with the realities of its time, providing solutions to contemporary challenges through the pharmacy of Islam.**

**This is what we seek in the method to be upheld by the imams. Therefore, we highlight several important matters as follows:**

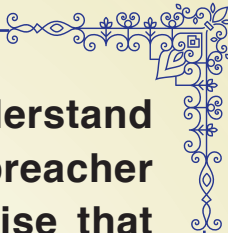
**Firstly, the objective of preserving the Islamic identity, emphasising that the Ummah in this regard is based on the principle of respecting**





**specialisation.**

**I understand that an imam in minority countries is expected to serve as one who leads the prayer, a preacher, and a speaker who reminds, admonishes, and guides the congregation. Additionally, an imam is expected to take on the role of a mufti, addressing matters of Islamic jurisprudence, overseeing marriage contracts, reconciling disputes, and providing guidance in divorce and other related issues. Therefore, let us strive for each imam to excel in the areas where excellence, care, and specialisation are required. We acknowledge the distinction between a preacher and a jurist, recognising that not every eloquent speaker on the pulpit is necessarily equipped to issue legal rulings on matters of halal and haram. Our community has long recognised the principle of specialisation, with scholars specialising in narration and others in jurisprudence. Exceptional individuals can merge the expertise of hadith and jurisprudence, while others may focus more on hadith or jurisprudence. The specialists in narration are likened to pharmacists, while the jurists**



are akin to physicians. Thus, we understand the difference between the role of a preacher and that of a mufti, and also recognise that there are certain judicial matters that a mufti should not delve into.

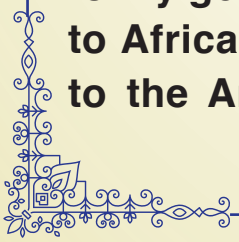
In the context of preserving our identity, it is imperative that we avoid an excess of condemnation and instead exert efforts in illuminating the path. This involves a meticulous understanding of legal alternatives, finding legitimate solutions, and thus liberating the Muslim community from the sin of deviation by avoiding prohibitions outlined in the Quran. The Quran forbids usury, but permits trade. It prohibits fornication, but allows marriage. It condemns gambling while permitting lawful transactions. This approach is constructive, not destructive – a positive methodology in finding legal outlets.

Finally, the function of this statement for the Islamic community is to encourage you to operate within the framework of your capabilities and possibilities. As the preacher of the prophets, Shu'ayb (peace be upon him), said



to his people: “I intend nothing but reform as much as I am able.” (Hud: 88). We transition from the realm of dreams to the ground of reality, from the desired example to the feasible and existing. It is essential to consider that this statement, with its theoretical and practical dimensions, should align with the context of the environment in which you reside.

Secondly, regarding fulfilling the duties of citizenship in the countries where you live. Many Muslims, when trying to connect with each other used to say, “Your brother in creed and religion, not in soil and clay.” This implies that allegiance to the land has no value. However, the Quran considers the displacement of a person from their land and homeland equivalent to killing oneself. Allah states, “If We had prescribed for them that they should kill themselves or that they should leave their homeland” (Surah An-Nisā: 66). The love for one’s homeland is inherent in human nature. Homelands are multi-faceted entities. I belong to my geographical homeland Sudan, I belong to Africa as a continental homeland, I belong to the Arab nation linguistically, I belong to



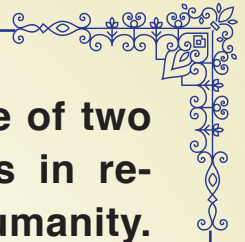


**the Islamic nation from Tangier to Jakarta, in terms of creed, whilst I belong to the entire human family from the aspect of our shared humanity. I bear witness that all humans are brothers.**

**While this narration is considered weak, it finds support in the fundamental principles of the Quran, which maintain that the bonds of faith, the highest form of connection, do not negate other types of relationships formed without the foundation of faith. This is evident in the Quranic verse, “The people of Noah denied the messengers when their brother Noah said to them, ‘Will you not fear?’” (Shu’arā: 105-106). Despite denying the prophethood of Noah and rejecting his message, the Quran affirms the existence of brotherhood among them. Other verses of the Quran corroborate this, “And recall the brother of (the nation of) ‘Ād, when he warned his people at the long, curved sand dunes” (Al-Ahqāf: 21).**

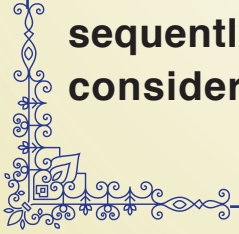
**A subtle insight from Imam Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) is noteworthy when he handed over the governance of Egypt to Ma-**

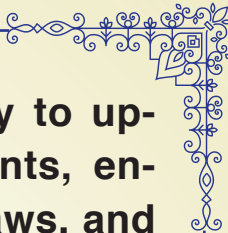




**lik ibn Al-Ashtar. He said, “People are of two types. They are either your brothers in religion, or they are your equals in humanity. Some may err, and flaws may appear among them. They may be subject to both deliberate and unintentional mistakes. Therefore, grant them forgiveness and pardon, just as you would like Allah to grant you forgiveness and pardon.”**

**Therefore, the homeland comprises multiple spheres, and this homeland in which you have found refuge and reside within, you entered it with a visa. This visa, whether leading to residency or citizenship, is fundamentally a contractual agreement, and contracts are meant to be honoured, “O you who have believed, fulfil [all] contracts.” (Māidah: 1). So, upon entering the country with this visa, you have committed to this contract, and one should not live off the gains of this land in terms of educational services and healthcare for oneself and one’s family without fulfilling the duties associated with earning citizenship. Consequently, there are several crucial matters to consider:**





**The first imperative is the necessity to uphold this contract and its requirements, encompassing respect for the system, laws, and the constitution.**

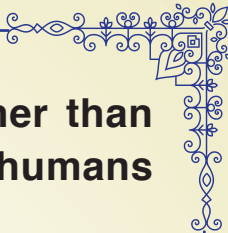
**The second imperative involves adhering to a peaceful civic approach in human conduct and interaction within this society.**

**The third imperative, which is of paramount importance, lies in our perception of the relationship with this community, with non-Muslims. This relationship is grounded in the following pillars:**

**The first pillar is the belief in the unity of the human origin, “O mankind, indeed your Lord is One, and indeed, I am the Messenger of Allah to you all.”**

**The second pillar is the belief in the inherent dignity of all human beings, “And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam.” (Al-Isrā: 70).**

**The third pillar is the recognition that human**



**brotherhood should be practiced rather than neglected: “And bear witness that all humans are brothers.”**

**The fourth pillar is our belief that the diversity among human beings, whether in languages, dialects, races, or beliefs, is divinely ordained, and there is no disputing the will of God, “Had your Lord willed, He would have made all the people a single community. But they will continue in their differences,” (Hūd: 118).**

**The fifth pillar is the belief that the outcome of this diversity is mutual acquaintance and understanding, “O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into races and tribes, so that you may identify one another.” (Al-Hujurāt: 13).**

**The sixth pillar underscores that addressing differences in beliefs should be done through the means of dialogue and the Quran emphasises its importance, “And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best.” (Al-‘Ankabūt: 46). Thus, when there are two good ways, choose the one that**

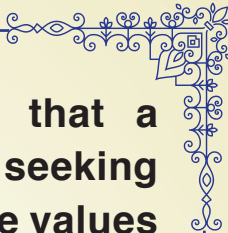




**is better and more virtuous.**

**The seventh pillar is the verse from the Quran which emphasises the principles of righteousness and justice in interpersonal relationships. Righteousness encompasses virtuous behaviour and good manners, particularly highlighted in the context of fulfilling the paramount duty of kindness to parents, following the worship of monotheism. The term is also cited in the broader context of interactions with non-Muslims. As for justice, Imam Al-Qurtubi argues that it goes beyond mere justice, signifying benevolence and excellence, as indicated by the verse, “And do not forget graciousness between yourselves” (Quran 2:237).**

**Therefore, these seven pillars in the relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims are not to be considered by the slogans you raise but through the conduct you practice. Hence, do not content yourselves with acquiring rights in the lands where you reside. Instead, you should integrate and propagate this awareness in Islamic existence through your ser-**

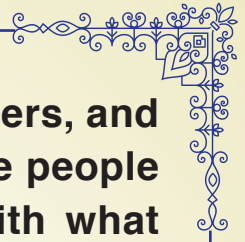


**mons and admonitions. Emphasise that a Muslim should fulfil his duties before seeking his rights, becoming an exemplar of the values of this great religion through benevolence, excellence in work, respect for the system and cleanliness, and the revival of positive civilisational values. This behaviour is observed and serves as a silent call before it is a verbal one.**

***A person might ask, how does one love the land in which they live?***

**The answer lies in the analogy of the ship, where people are on board, and a breach occurs. Our sense of being part of this homeland necessitates teaching Muslim children in those regions that individuals are concerned about this country in terms of its security, stability, growth, and adherence to peaceful civil practices within the framework of the available law.**

**When the offensive cartoons of our Master and Prophet - peace and blessings be upon him - emerged in Denmark, protests erupted in the Islamic world, demanding a boycott of**

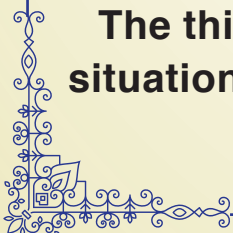


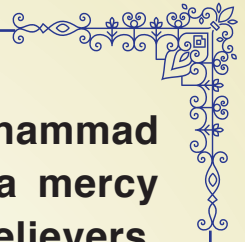
**Danish goods. I contacted some brothers, and others did the same. I conveyed to the people of Denmark that you cannot align with what happened in the Islamic world because this would subject you to legal consequences. You are Danish citizens, and this affiliation entails rights and duties. If you were to demand this, you will be in violation of the law, but you should pursue alternative avenues to serve the cause, including:**

***First:*** The legal path – advocating for the enactment of a law criminalising disrespect towards sacred values, religions, and symbols, which is your right.

***Second:*** The political path – addressing politicians, explaining that this affects the bonds of national unity in the country where you reside, and you are an integral part of this society.


**The third is the path of da’wah – utilizing the situation as an opportunity to introduce the**





**esteemed status of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who came as a mercy to all of humanity, encompassing believers, non-believers, and even the animate and inanimate creation. The positive conduct of Muslims in Denmark in addressing this issue resulted in the construction of a mosque dedicated to the Prophet of Mercy, funded by the benevolent initiative of the Qatari prince. This mosque has become a beacon visited by tourists, students, and scholars. Additionally, the establishment of a cemetery, a long-sought request, was granted. These accomplishments demonstrate the Muslims' desire to address the concerns of their community and sacred values within the available framework in the country. The success lies in their adept utilisation of the ample opportunities presented in this society.**

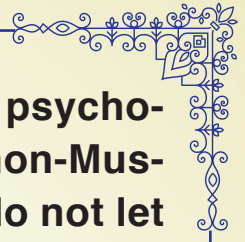




***Therefore, you have two responsibilities:***

**1. A responsibility related to preserving Islamic existence in terms of creed, morality, values, family, and society.**

**2. The effective utilisation of citizenship requirements, ensuring that Muslims do not live in isolation, seclusion, or withdrawal. There is an opportunity to present the Islamic civilisational perspective to a society that has been morally polluted and natural disposition corrupted, which is targeted to be allured in the world of desires and suspicions. All these issues call for genuine interaction from Muslims. Hence, we have raised the slogan “Interaction without assimilation and uniqueness without isolation.” Engage with this society without losing your identity, contribute to maintaining your uniqueness without withdrawing or isolating yourselves. Consequently, you also contribute to raising awareness in this community and spreading the guidance of religion through exemplary behaviour and vibrant civilisational initiatives.**

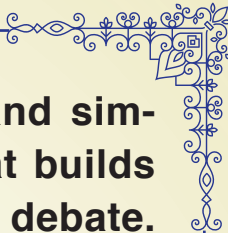


**It is crucial for the imam to break the psychological barrier between himself and non-Muslims. Do not let clothing be a barrier, do not let adherence to the customs of the Islamic world be a stumbling block, and do not bring the problems of Islamic work in Muslim countries to create issues in this land.**

**You must gather the conditions for reform by paying attention to this reality. Take the best of the Islamic world's goodness, but acknowledge that you live in an environment with its own uniqueness, logic, and priorities. Be a tool for construction, not for destruction. Address this society and the new generation of youth with the language of their time.**

**Lastly, make sure not to transfer the doctrinal, sectarian, jurisprudential, activist, and partisan differences that distorted the beauty of Islamic work and hindered its progress. Unify the Islamic presence based on the fundamentals of the religion, on commonalities and universalities, while allowing room for some differences in branches and details. Avoid burdening Muslims with such disputes and pres-**






**ent this material to them with ease and simplicity. Free the issues, focus on what builds upon action, not on what builds upon debate.**

**Monitor doubts and questions raised about Islam in the West and respond to them using a scientific and well-established methodology, involving experts and specialists and translating these responses into the languages of these lands. Deal with organisations working on refuting doubts and answering sceptical questions.**

**In conclusion, hold fast to the rope of Allah together, commit to brotherhood, tolerance, moderation, cooperation in righteousness and piety, and nurture calm dialogue and peaceful methods in addressing issues of disagreement. Stay away from rigid approaches and paths of extremism that distort the image of Islam and harm Muslims in general and Muslim minorities specifically. Allah says: “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best.” (Al-Nahl: 125).**



**These are some pieces of advice I wanted to share with you. May Allah grant you success and guidance in calling to Him in an environment of diverse perspectives, in the environment of behaviours, in the world of awareness, and in the world of striving – within the framework of a nation that responds and a nation of invitation.**

**Our last supplication is that all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds.**