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appropriate occasion for the Muslim community to engage in a serious exercise of introspection and self-examination on the prevalence of this scourge within itself.

How honest and true have we as a Muslim community been in upholding the spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah against racism?

Have we been successful in expunging racism in its manifest and concealed forms from our own societies?

Has there been any serious process of integration with Muslim brothers and sisters from other race groups within our communities and how successful has this program been?

Have racist remarks, jokes and racist epithets left our societies forever or are these still encountered?

Do we condone these when they are encountered or do we protest strongly against them?

Deep within our hearts, do we find true respect for other human beings - even the very poor, the down-trodden and the underprivileged - as our equals, or is there a disease of 'superiority' that bugs our inner selves?

These are some of the critical, albeit awkward questions that we constantly need to ask ourselves. **If the answers to these questions are not favourable, then is it not long overdue for a concerted internal struggle to rectify our wrongs and put our house in order?**

SMASHING THE IDOL OF Racism

By: Mufti Zubair Bayat

(This article written at the time of the UN's "World Conference Against Racism" held in Durban in 2001)

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings with a sense of conscience and humanity are deeply disturbed by the plague of racism that is threatening the future of the human race in our troubled world. Despite the many international conventions, conferences and resolutions against racism as a violation of basic human rights, this ugly phenomenon stubbornly refuses to disappear.

Whilst, the global anti-racism process is taking its course, there is a great need for Muslims to become actively involved in the struggle against racism from within and without, with a view to eradicating it from their own psyches, practices and societies - and to vigourously militate against it where ever it may be found in the world, more so in their own communities. For the achievement of this noble aspiration, it is important to firstly understand the Islamic perspective on racism.

THE HOLY MESSENGER'S ﷺ WAR AGAINST RACISM

At a time when the world was steeped in nauseating racism, and mankind could find no way out of this dark tunnel, the sun of Islam rose and showed how all members of the human race could live alongside each other as equals.

The Holy Messenger's ﷺ in his farewell pilgrimage sermon could veritably be called the first charter of human rights, which smashed the idol of racism with one mighty blow: "O people! The Arab enjoys no superiority over the non-Arab, nor does the non-Arab enjoy any supremacy over the Arab, the white enjoys no superiority over the black,

nor does the black enjoy any supremacy over the white, expect on the basis of piety. All of you are from Adam and Adam was created from soil." This was but one of several such declarations made by him ﷺ as Allah's final Messenger.

The Holy Messenger's ﷺ powerful message was not only empty rhetoric and hollow slogans (as is the current trend in today's world) but even by way of his personal example, he showed how the monster of racism can be expunged from society.

HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH BILAL BIN RABAH ﷺ

Bilal ﷺ was a negro and a slave at that. As it is, slaves occupied a very low and degrading status in the Makkan society and a black slave was in a more disadvantaged position than other slaves. On the other hand, the Holy Messenger ﷺ was from the highest rank of Arab lineage - he was a Quraishi and a Hashimi at that. In a dark world that was steeped in ignorance and arrogance - the two potent ingredients of any racist society - it was unimaginable for the people to understand how the noblest of the noble could reach out to the lowest of the low (in their opinion) and make him a bosom friend and companion. But Hazrat Muhammad ﷺ did just that. It was an act of supreme courage and a great test. His very act of shattering entrenched racism was cited by many a noblemen of the Makkans as the barrier that prevented their acceptance of the message of Islam, but he did not back down.

They expressed great resentment for his open-minded attitude towards the 'low caste' of

society and threatened to reject his message on this very basis.

They wanted him to compromise - they were prepared to accept his message so long as the racist order of the day was not disturbed in anyway - but he flatly refused to entertain any such thing. He remained steadfast and unflinching on his position against racism.

This was more important to him than appeasing the 'racists' and reaching any compromise with them. For he had indeed come to declare war against racism as an integral part of his divine mission.

QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE ON RACISM

The Final and last Testament of Allah to humanity is no less in its powerful crusade against racism. For instance, the verse: "**O people! Fear your Sustainer who created you from a single soul and He created from it its partner and He spread from them large multitudes of men and women ...**" (4/1). The fact that all of humanity emanates from a single source - one mother and father - means that all of humanity is really one, despite the variety of shades, complexions, languages and cultures they portray. This necessitates the equality of human beings before one another, a fact which the Qur'an repeatedly proclaims in its majestic verses.

DOES THE HIDEOUS DEMON OF RACISM STILL PLAGUE THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY?

Whilst the world is rightly condemning the cancer of racism, it is an important and