

Friday Khutbah - Anti-BDS Bill UK

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Islam is a universal and complete way of life

Almighty Allah mentions in the Holy Qur'ān:

"You are the best community ever raised for humanity; you encourage good, forbid evil and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are faithful, but most are rebellious. *[Al-Qur'an, 3:110]*

All Praises be for Allah Who has given us a complete way of life based on a religion which is absolute and perfect. Islam is not merely a religion that focuses solely on worship and spirituality; it is a complete way of life that encompasses all aspects. It teaches us how to live in any place, any time and any circumstance including within a multicultural society, giving everyone their due rights, whilst not leaving the fundamentals and most basic beliefs that make us Muslims.

Islam commands Muslims to speak against injustice wherever it is.

Politics and social justice is amongst the teachings of our beautiful religion and an important part of it as it is, in its essence, about power, governance, and decision-making. It shapes the societies we live in, the laws we abide by, and the opportunities available to us. Unfortunately, at times we witness instances of injustice and oppression around the world. Whether it is economic disparities, political corruption, human rights abuses, or discrimination against certain groups, injustice is prevalent in various forms. Being followers of a global religion, as Muslims, we are commanded to help and support oppressed people wherever they may be and work actively to stop and change evil.

Allah the Most High says in the Qur'an, "O you who have believed, stand firmly for Allah as witnesses in justice, and let not the hatred of any people provoke you to be unjust. Be just - that is nearer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah; indeed, Allah is [fully] Aware of what you do." *[Al-Qur'ān, 5:8]*

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was not only a spiritual leader but also a political figure who implemented justice in every aspect of his life. He stood firmly against oppression and fought for the rights of the weak and marginalised. The Prophet said, "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or is being oppressed." The people asked, "O Messenger of Allah! We help the one being oppressed, but how do we help an oppressor?" The Prophet replied, "By seizing his hand." *[Bukhari]*

This hadith teaches us an essential lesson about standing up to injustice. It means that we should not support or enable the oppressors in their wrongdoing. We must denounce any form of oppression, whether it is committed by individuals, governments, or institutions. Silence in the face of injustice is not an option for a true believer.

Furthermore, on the authority of Abu Sa`eed al-Khudree (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, “Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then let him change it with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.” *[Muslim]*

Therefore, as Muslims, we should actively engage in the political process, promoting justice, fairness, and the well-being of society as a whole. However, it is crucial to remember that while we engage in the political realm, we must do so with the utmost integrity, adhering to the teachings of Islam. Our actions should be rooted in sincerity and based on wisdom and knowledge. We should never resort to violence, aggression, or unlawful means. Islam emphasises the importance of peaceful and constructive methods in bringing about positive change.

Challenging the BDS Bill of the UK Government

In the context of the aforementioned verses and ahadith, the topic of this Khutba is related to the UK Government’s anti-divestment bill and our role as British citizens in challenging it.

Background

The UK government has tabled a Bill which aims to stop the BDS movement. What is BDS? BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions and is a global campaign which aims to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law & end the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

It is a Palestinian led movement for freedom, justice and equality. It aims to uphold the simple principle that the Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.

Inspired by the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the Palestinian BDS urges nonviolent pressure on Israel until it complies with international law in relation to its occupation. However, the UK Government want to stop this movement with the anti-divestment bill. This bill aims to silence support for the BDS movement and unjustly demonises solidarity with Palestinians and hinders human rights advocacy.

An important point to note is that it is crucial to distinguish between criticising a government's policies & discriminating against its people. Criticising the policies of a country or its government is a legitimate expression of free speech and political discourse. BDS is about holding the Israeli Government to account, and is not an attack on the Jewish people – this distinction is very important and we as a Muslim community must be careful that we do not confuse the two. We need to be clear that supporting BDS does not equate to antisemitism, as our Government is trying to argue, but is about advocating for Palestinian rights.

The anti-divestment bill overlooks human rights violations and fails to address the need for justice and equality. Consequently, the anti-divestment bill contradicts the global trend of supporting the rights of marginalised communities and promoting accountability for human rights abuses. We should stand for justice and equality, not silence dissent.

The bill silences legitimate criticism of oppressive policies and disregards the voices of those affected by Israeli violence and apartheid. It is crucial to protect the right to boycott, divest, & engage in peaceful activism. The anti-divestment bill is a disheartening step backwards, hindering freedom of expression, criminalising dissent, and largely overlooking Israel's transgressions.

We MUST stand up for justice and human rights.

What must we do?

Muslims are obliged to take all means to protect their Deen. As mentioned earlier, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.' *[Muslim]*

There are steps that each one of us must take. There is still an opportunity to stop the Bill or at the very least amend it.

You may ask, what is the point, the Government will do what it wants anyway, and campaigns like BDS are a waste of time. There are three points here;

1. We know that in any action the reward Insha'Allah is in the intention and the effort we put in – the outcome is determined by Allah. When we stand before Allah on the day of judgement, Allah will not ask us, what change did you make. But He will ask us what effort did you make and what steps did you take.
2. Campaigns like BDS have previously been successful. Apartheid in South Africa was defeated largely as a result of pressure brought about by the sanctions movement that made South Africa a pariah on the international stage
3. Finally, we must understand that our Government wants to ban BDS because they are afraid it will be successful, and lead to greater public awareness and opposition to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians

So what practical steps can we take:

[1] Rely on Allah to help us as is mentioned in the Qur'ān.

"and put your trust in Allah if you are believers indeed." *[Al-Qur'ān, 5:23]*

"And there is no victory except from Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise." *[Al-Qur'ān, 8:10]*

Indeed, trust in Allah (tawakkul) is an integral aspect of our faith as Muslims. It is the firm belief and reliance on Allah's wisdom, power, and guidance in all aspects of our lives. We are still in the days of Dhul Hijjah. During the days of Hajj we are encouraged to increase in our dhikr of takbeer, Allahu Akbar. And the essence of Allahu Akbar is that He is more powerful,

more magnificent and more majestic than anyone and anything else. So the first step for Muslims is to put our trust and reliance in Allah, the Most Powerful, the Most Magnificent, the Most Majestic.

[2] Each one of us must understand the bill and the implications on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Educate family members and colleagues.

[3] Send letters and emails to your local MP.

It is the MP's that will be voting on the bill. Therefore, we must lobby our MP's to ensure they vote against the bill. Write to your local MP explaining why the Anti-BDS Bill is harmful to freedom of speech in Britain.

[4] And we must make du'ā' and pray that Allah helps us to overcome this bill, and allows us to continue to practise our religion peacefully.

As Allah mentions:

“..and your Lord has said: “Call upon Me; I will respond to you. Indeed! Those who disdain My worship will surely enter Hell in humiliation.” *[Al-Qur'ān, 40:60]*
