

Back on Track



Thursday, 30 July 2009 09:07

For the first time since I arrived at the conference, I was feeling very tired, even though this was the most sleep I had gotten all weekend. After my dear brother Dr. Zaki and I woke up and performed our morning prayer, I asked him to set the alarm so I can get at least an hour of sleep before heading to the airport. That hour seemed like 5 minutes and before I knew it, the alarm woke me up. I left the room without disturbing Zaki who was asleep and headed to the airport. With my back pain, the 2 hour flight to San Francisco seemed like it would last forever. As I was waiting for my connecting flight back to Washington D.C., I felt lonely and decided to put my experience of the conference in writing.

First, I must confess; after a traumatic year of suspicions and uncertainty about BADR, I was struggling with myself when deciding to attend this years conference. However, once I decided to go ahead with the journey to Seattle, I pumped my self with positive thoughts. I knew the fragility and the weaknesses we poses as humans. The devil is always busy trying to keep us apart and divide us and the devil always portrays the good as bad and the bad as good. As our beloved Prophet, peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, said: "Religion is but an advise", I decided to be among my brethren to be advised and give my advice. Thanks to God, I can proudly say that BADR is back on track. The greatness of an organization or an individual is measured not only by its success but also by its ability to see through its weaknesses and improve on them. For four days, after each morning prayer, the board of trustees, board of directors, and the executive committee, met for an average of 3 hours to assess BADR's weaknesses and strength. I was very much impressed with the diversity of these members and their frankness and willingness to deal with the short comings and move forward. The discussions were frank, and at times heated yet we still managed to come up with solutions. Our hearts and minds were focused on the interest of Ethiopian Muslims and we were coming to the meeting after the dawn prayer where we were hearing the advises of the different scholars that were instrumental in softening our hearts, it was not difficult for us to come to total agreement in every subject we discussed. We agreed that the unity of Ethiopian Muslims is paramount and we decided to work towards this unity with purpose. We agreed that the Da'wa (propagation) of Islam and the advocacy of Ethiopian Muslims civic and human rights are core values of BADR that can not be compromised for any reason. Keeping these three core values in mind we agreed to work with any entity inside or outside Ethiopia to accomplish BADR's goals. We agreed that BADR's peaceful and legal activities will enhance the development of peaceful co-existence between the different faith groups in Ethiopia hence preparing Ethiopian Muslims to be equal participants in the development of the country in every sphere. That was my happiest moment, feeling that all of our goals were within reach as long as we stayed united.

I believe unity is strength. As the saying goes: "When the sand grains unite they become a vast desert, when the sea drops unite they become a boundless ocean, the conglomeration of stars in the firmament of sky soothes our eyes, the seven colors emerge in the shape of a bewitching rainbow." The unity of people makes an invincible strong nation. This is the reason Islam lays great stress on the importance of unity. The Islamic concept of Tawheed is the other name of the unity of humankind. The corner stone in Islam is the unity of God. Allah's unity teaches us the message that we should not divide humans into sections and sects. Racial discrimination has been strictly prohibited in Islam. The Almighty Allah in the Quran says that the division of people into races and clans is only for their introduction. The best one out of them is the one who is pious. At the conference, scholars after scholars informed us that Islam is the greatest unifying force in the world. It is a religion to all humans regardless of color, race and language. It is a religion that tolerates other religions and orders its followers to respect and protect all humans. The scholars quoted different sayings of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). In one of his sayings, the Holy Prophet told us that all persons belong to Adam and Adam was from soil. This is meant to

humble and ground us. In his last sermon from the Mount of Arafat the Holy Prophet had clearly announced that no Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab; or the white over the black. One of the scholars that I was privileged to meet and get to know, shiekh Ali Jimma who came from Kenya to attend BADR's conference, explicitly warned us not to be divided based on ethnicity or language and advised us to unite and become stronger if our intentions are to work for Islam and Muslims.

Islam gives clear injunctions for the respect, safety, security and prosperity of the non-Muslims as well. Unity teaches peace, equality and fraternity. The absence of unity brings and breeds disruption, devastation and disputes. The unity of all humans is the ultimate aim of the teachings of Islam. The doctrinal and ideological differences should not lead to war or bloodshed. Man is a thinking creature. The Quran, time and again, asserts the need of cogitation. "Ijtihad" is an analogical and analytical approach towards the matters of jurisprudence. Ashab-e-Suffa were the people of wisdom. They gave more time to cogitate on social and academic matters along with their spiritual practices. They were praised by the Prophet (PBUH) for their involvement in intellectual pursuit. Once the Prophet (PBUH) said: "The juristic scholar who receives two rewards for every correct decision and even one for every incorrect one, for he is endeavoring with all his effort to reach the correct decision." The difference of opinion must be positive. It should not lead to prides and prejudices of scholars. There were differences between the close companions of the Prophet (PBUH). These differences were on principle; not personal. Of course with the Prophet near them, they resolved their differences easily. That is why Islam in such a short period spread to a vast and different parts of the world. The four school of thoughts in Islam were the result of the ijtihaad of the great scholars of Islam to facilitate the practice of Islam for generations to come but it was not meant to create divisions. That is why we have to tell our scholars in Ethiopia to stop the divide by categorizing themselves as Suffis, Wehabis, etc. These are totally alien categories introduced by the enemies of Islam to divide and conquer. By affirming the concept of unity, thanks to God, BADR has categorically rejected these artificial labeling and barriers to divide the Muslim community.

The Qur'an discusses the concept of unity as follows: "O, Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is the one who has piety." (49:13). The Quran also asserts on the unity of the Muslims. In Sura Al-e-Imran the Quran says: "And hold fast, all of you together to the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves." (3:103). Then Quran condemns sectarianism and regards it shirk (polytheism). The Quran again in Sura Al-e-Imran says: "O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) says; "The Muslims are like a body; if one limb aches, the whole body aches." Then the Messenger of Allah says; "whoever does not care about the affairs of the Muslims is not one of them." From the above Quranic and Hadith facts we deduce the result that Islam believes in the unity of all humans and preaches peace, justice and equality. Religion is to serve humankind and humans are in this world to serve the Almighty Allah by serving his creatures.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY FOR ETHIOPIAN MUSLIMS:

As we long for the unity of the larger Umma, we often neglect the division among individual nations with unique societal and socio economics as well as political experiences. What makes Ethiopian Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds unique in their experience from other Muslim communities around the world is that their collective suffering and in fact their existence was denied and neglected both by their adversary the Christian establishment in Ethiopia and the rest of the Muslim world. This was not because that they did not struggle as some do suggest but they were not united in their struggle as one Umma with one cause but were divided in their ethnicity that was exploited by the ruling establishment to further diminish their standing within the modern day Ethiopia.

As Ethiopian Muslims started migrating to other countries especially after 1974 and felt comfortable in settling in their new environment, they started to wonder and think of how to connect to the mother land. With their new experience in freedom of worship and assembly outside Ethiopia, the suffering of their Muslim brethren in Ethiopia became more clearer. As for Ethiopian Muslims within Ethiopia, the phenomena of Islamic awareness that gripped the Muslim and non-Muslim world did not spare them and they became actively and visibly studying and practicing their religion. With their meager resources and without outside assistance they started building their places of worship that always infuriates the Church and brought tension that at times brought attacks against them.

The ever growing strong Ethiopian church and its domestic and foreign supporters are visibly challenging and even questioning the Ethiopian identity of the Muslims. For Ethiopian Muslims it has become a matter of existence. Muslim students are struggling to practice the fundamentals of their religion. Muslims of the ancient city Axum are forbidden from building places of worship and if they die they are not allowed to be buried in the city of their birth.

Because of the historical subjugation and denial of equal citizenship, Ethiopian Muslims lack far behind in educational, health, and economic development. These and other important issues that are uniquely Ethiopian, demands from Ethiopian Muslims in Diaspora to take their historical responsibility to struggle to bring positive change to alleviate the plight of their brethren. BADR from its inception made it a goal to be an active advocator for the wellbeing of Ethiopian Muslims and this is why we all should work tirelessly to strengthen it. The outcome of the conference as it is stated in BADR's communiqué is encouraging and promising. The potential for BADR to unite the ¾ million Ethiopian Muslims in Diaspora under its leadership and peacefully struggle for the civic and human right of Ethiopian Muslims should not be taken lightly. It can bring the needed positive change where Muslims are treated as equal citizens under the constitution of the country. This is not only a positive change for Muslims but it will be a positive change for Ethiopia as a whole.

As a grass root organization, and as BADR takes the helm of the leadership of Ethiopian Muslims in Diaspora, the rank and file members of BADR must vigorously support it both physically and financially in order to strengthen it. Technology is at our finger tips and BADR must utilize the cyber community to reach out to the thousands of Ethiopian Muslims throughout the world to bring them together. The world has become a small village and exchanging information can be done instantly across the globe. This is a blessing from the Almighty Allah if used properly.

"Our Lord! Pour forth on us patience and make us victorious over the disbelieving people." (2/250)

"Our Lord! Put not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us and grant us Forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Maula (Patron, Supporter and Protector, etc.) and give us victory over the disbelieving people." (2/286)

"Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and our transgressions (in keeping our duties to You), establish our feet firmly, and give us victory over the disbelieving folk." (3/147)

Ameen!

Najib Mohammed

7/28/2009