



Address of Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar



The Grand Imam of Azhar, Dr. Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, was appointed in 2010. He holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Philosophy from Paris Sorbonne University. He served as Grand Mufti of Egypt and has been director of Al-Azhar University since 2003. He took a lead role in condemning the kidnappings and enslavement of girls by Boko Haram and led the Islamic world in saying the abductions “completely contradict Islam and its principles of tolerance”. He has also stated that “The Quran granted humans their freedom to believe or disbelieve. Islam prohibited the kidnapping of women and children, and as slavery was prevalent in that age, Islam made freeing a slave equal to erasing sins, and made all humans equal in front of Allah, with only knowledge and good deeds to elevate one over another”.

CEREMONY FOR THE SIGNING OF THE JOINT DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGAINST SLAVERY

Casina Pio IV, Tuesday, 2 December 2014

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,

All praise is due to God Who created the people, males and females, made them into nations and tribes and set the balance to judge who is most righteous by virtue of piety regardless of color, ethnicity, or social status. God the Almighty says: “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. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things].” Surat Al-Hujurat (Verse 13)

I send peace and blessings upon the best of God’s creation (peace and blessings be upon him) who said: “An Arab has no superiority over except by piety. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous.” Our Trustworthy Prophet was saying about Salman Al Farsi, who lived the darkness of slavery: “Salman is one of the People of the House”, and introduced him many times before Notables of Quraish. The Prophet’s Companions and those who came after them (may God be pleased with all of them) followed the teachings contained in God’s Book and the Sunnah of His noble Prophet. The words of our master Umar Ibn Al-Khattab to Amr Ibn Al Aas (God Bless Them), dissatisfied with the son of Al Aas who had beaten a man from the Copts, allowing the Copt man to punish the son: “Since when have you enslaved the people when their mothers have borne them free” ring a familiar bell with all people.

Slavery was one of the major problems that plagued pre-Islamic Arabia. It was so pervasive that a person could lose his freedom and be enslaved by his creditor simply by failing to settle his debt, turning from the light of freedom to the darkness of execrable slavery.

At no point did Islam condone slavery between the people whom it deems as being equal from the same father, Adam, and the same mother, Eve. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “All people are from Adam and Adam was created from dust. Let the people cease to boast about their ancestors or they will be of less account with God than the beetle [which rolls dung with its nose].”

In spite of Islam’s position, it was not conducive to the affairs of the people to abolish the institution of slavery altogether. The reason for this was because it constituted a source of wealth which would have been difficult for the people to abandon at once, as money is dear to the soul. Islam therefore took a gradual approach to remedy this problem. It exhorted slave owners to treat their slaves well and not burden them beyond their capacity. It then narrowed the sources of slavery and deemed that the only method for gaining captives is during warfare. Not every prisoner can be taken as a slave. It is an option of four: with the option of keeping prisoner as a slave being the least preferable one. Prisoners of war could be freed, and Islam further made the emancipation of slaves as expiation for involuntary killing, for breaking the fast in Ramadan and for equating wife with mother. Islam also considered the emancipation of slaves as one of the greatest acts of worship which please God.

Through this wise policy pursued by Islam to limit the sources of slavery and expand the means of emancipation, the practice of slavery came to end only a short while after the advent of Islam. It is not right what is claimed by those researchers who lack deep understanding of Islamic Sharia that Islam has paved the way for sustainable slavery as it instructed treating slaves with kindness and care, which those researchers considered as a legitimacy of slavery. The truth is that Islam took this approach as a temporary solution to an intractable problem, until Islam was able, later, to find a radical solution to eradicate slavery.

Despite the ratification of the abolition of slavery by tolerant Islamic law and the laws of other Heavenly revealed faiths, today we continue to battle slavery as it is still extant in some countries. Contemporary institutions of slavery include human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, child slavery, women oppression and depriving women from holding appropriate positions, discrimination on the basis of gender, race or belief, and forced migrant labor. All of these and other forms of slavery are deemed reprehensible in Islamic law and religious and human rights institutions, authorities and organizations must all work to abolish them and push countries to enact laws and legislations that deter the deprivation of freedoms. To achieve this goal, Al Azhar Al Sharif is working in collaboration with other concerned institutions, and therefore Grand Imam of Muslims Sheikh Al Azhar (May Allah Protect Him) has delegated me. I join hand with you and convey Grand Imam's best wishes to you in your efforts, as Al Azhar Al Sharif is working to serve all humanity.

Thank you.

Presented by Dr. Abbas Shuman, *Deputy of Al-Azhar*