

Ramadan Charity: a lifeline in the time of COVID-19

Muslims should share their blessings with those less fortunate in their community to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

By Dr Yagob Al-Mazrou

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Islamic Advisory Group

Ramadan is the most important month of the Islamic calendar where Muslims fast from dawn to dusk and congregate for special night-time prayers. This holy month is also distinguished by a spirit of contributing to the community in the form of free iftar meals, food supplies and cash donations. According to the Holy Quran, we can prioritize charity for the following groups: parents, kindred, orphans, the poor and the wayfarer/traveler. The Quran promises great rewards for this act of social solidarity:

“The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn); it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold increase to whom He wills.”
(Al-Baqara)

This spirit of generosity and sharing has acquired even more importance this Ramadan as it falls at a time when the world is reeling from the drastic repercussions of the COVID-19 - a disease which has killed hundreds of thousands and infected millions. The lockdowns, curfews and other forms of mobility restrictions to curb the spread of the virus have far-reaching socioeconomic implications for communities where complete industries and businesses have been paralyzed, with millions of jobs lost. While almost everybody is affected, those hit hardest are the poor, the underprivileged, and those who were already living hand to mouth. They did not just lose their livelihood, but also the generosity usually extended by others, leaving them desperate to make ends meet.

This is where the Ramadan spirit of togetherness can make a difference. The highly respected Islamic religious organizations of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, two founding partners of the Islamic Advisory Group, have encouraged Muslims to share their blessings, no matter how small, with those impacted by COVID-19. They have advised that Muslims can advance payment of their annual zakat al-mal by a year or two to help the needy at these testing times. They have resolved that zakat al-Fitr, usually paid at the end of Ramadan, can be advanced and paid throughout the holy month. Eminent scholars have also encouraged Muslims to donate more this Ramadan to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable in their local communities. The Quran advises Muslims:

“By no means shall you attain Al-Birr (piety, righteousness), unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever of good you spend, Allah knows it well.” (Aal-i-Imraan) Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) also said: *“They do not truly believe in my message those who go to bed on a full stomach knowing that their neighbors are hungry.”* [Al-Tabarani]

Muslims should extend all possible assistance, psychological and financial, to help their communities at these hard times, knowing full well that doing so will earn them Allah's acceptance. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Those Allah loves the most are those who serve people the best." [Al-Tabarani]

While in this Ramadan many of us are physically distant, we must remain socially and spiritually connected as one human family.

Dr Yagob Al-Mazrou

Chairman, Executive Committee

The Islamic Advisory Group is a partnership of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), along with eminent religious scholars and health experts.