

Justice and Human Rights

[The following appears on the black screen]

'All animals are equal... but some of them are too stupid to believe that.'
George Orwell.... With slight modification.... In fact, not so slight.

The Title

Narrator 1:

Human rights: a beautiful slogan. The question is: who?
Arabs? Europeans? Americans? Anglo-Saxons? Protestants? The Rich? The Powerful? Or simply those whom it is in our interests that they should have their rights?

I was always interested in the concept of human rights. I saw a man shooting civilians, aiming to kill them. He then returned to his country where he received a hero's welcome. Yet his country took a high moral stand on human rights. [Suggestion for the producer: show the American sniper, Chris Kyle]

Some countries protect their citizens and also their animals. A cat stranded on a high tree, unable to come down may be helped by a number of firemen who rush to bring the cat down. Yet the country where this took place as a normal occurrence remains heedless of thousands of people working in factories at wages that do not exceed 15 cents per hour. Such contradiction did not make me angry but it surprised me and made me curious.

I now understand what they mean when they speak of human rights. They mean the rights of their own people: 'our rights'.

This is the opposite of the Islamic attitude which respects everyone's humanity. Whether you are white, black, Asian or red-Indian is of little significance. [succession of people appear: a white man, a black person, Chinese, red-Indian]. You may be poor or disabled, but this is of no effect. Indeed, whether you are a Muslim or a non-Muslim, you are entitled to your full rights and to indiscriminate justice.

Look at our world today: you will see at a glance the outcome of man-made theories and principles: you see communities torn apart, and entire villages and towns destroyed, with no one raising objection. Yet the world of moral principles and human rights sheds tears for far less important events. It is a world where principles are stretched and shrink according to the race and colour of the victim.

[short silence]

Islam advocates absolute justice between all people. God says in the Qur'an: 'God enjoins justice, kindness [to all], and generosity to one's kindred; and He forbids all that is shameful, all reprehensible conduct and aggression.' Justice is a central duty which God has made binding on all Muslims. Injustice is forbidden. God has made it so, even to himself as He says: 'My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice and made it forbidden among you. So do not be unjust to one another.'

Prophet Muhammad's life shows a practical implementation of this principle. Let us take just one example: 'Shortly before the Battle of Badr, the Prophet was marshalling his troops and he had a short stick to adjust their lines. He passed by

Sawad ibn Ghuzayyah who stood with half his body protruding out of the line. The Prophet poked him with his small stick in his abdomen, saying: 'Stand properly, Sawad'. The man said: 'You have hurt me, Messenger of God, when God has sent you with a message of truth and justice. Give me my right.' The Prophet lifted his clothes so that his tommy was visible and said to the man: 'Take your revenge, Sawad.'

Under the best and most well implemented human rights convention today, can a soldier ask his commander for justice? Could he ask to be allowed to do to the commander what the commander had done to him? The Prophet gave his soldier that very right fourteen centuries ago.

The question that bothers me: Does Islam need a human rights convention? Or rather, do human rights conventions need Islamic law?