

Environmental Degradation, Security and Peace in a Multi-Religious Setting: Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT: *The paper focuses on the negative consequences of Environmental Degradation on peace and security of a particular region or any geographical entity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the most Merciful. Islam is a religion of universal order, integrated harmony and a unique system that harmonises the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal and the corporeal with spiritual. Islam, therefore, has its place on all mans' earthly life; as Islamic matrix enable us to perform and function well; be in peace with ourselves, our community and the world and to gain happiness in this world and the hereafter. It is in deed, a religion that has an elaborate hierarchy of integrated knowledge based on the principle of Divine Unity (Tawhid – belief in the Oneness of God) which includes: judicial, social, theological sciences, spiritual, and metaphysical – both of which originate from the Holy Qur'an.

On this notion, therefore, issues of Environmental Degradation, Peace and Social Security have been adequately taken care of in Islam. However, in this paper for logical explanation and easy understanding of the subject matter in particular, the Islamic perspective of each of these issues were briefly discussed and thereafter, their interwoven relationship were established based on the teaching and practice of Islam and conventional knowledge.

II. ENVIRONMENT

Conventionally, environment refers to “the overall set of circumstances or influences that surround and affect an individual or community; which includes: physical or natural conditions and socioeconomic features”. Broadly, this consists of three basic components. These are: i) Physical – Atmosphere, Land and Water; ii) Biological – Fauna and Flora and iii) Socioeconomic – societal, political and economic. Loosely, this portrays the habitable qualities of the planet earth as the habitat and the home of man. This definition to some extent goes in line with Islamic concept of Environment. Based on Islamic teaching the planet earth and all therein were created by Allah (SWT) to serve as a temporary home of man where he can worship his Creator before he meets his Creator at the permanent home – Heaven. As contained in Suratul Al-Mursalat - Chapter 77 verse 25 -26: ***“Have we not made the Earth an abode for the living and the dead?”***

On practical terms, moreover, environmental set up enhances the understanding of the spiritual relationship between the Creator, human being and other creation. It also discloses the position of man as the ambassador of Allah (SWT) on the earth and his responsibilities in managing the environmental resources for his sustenance in order to enable him worship Allah (SWT). In suratul Baqara – Chapter 2 verse 22, Allah (SWT) says it is He: ***“Who has made the earth your couth and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth)”***.

Based on Islamic teaching, therefore, environment with its varied resources are not to be considered as the particulate possession of one generation that it can be disposed any how. Thus, it should be preserved and conserve for the future generations as stressed by Allah (SWT) ***“There shall be for you on earth a habitation and provision of a time”***.

In spite of all these gesture, Allah (SWT) Has done to man, man in essence for the seek of short term comfort and ease benefits, is now destroying his environment through deforestation; pollution; radiation, extinction of flora and fauna etc that culminates to degradation. All these nasty attitudes and behaviour of man ('unguided') towards his dear fellow human, group, community, and nature were portrayed in the Glorious Qur'an in Suratul Al-An'am - Chapters 6 verses 27 & 111; (Al-Araf) 7:131 and 8:34 – where Allah (SWT) says ***“And when he turns away, his effort in the land is to make mischief and to destroy the crops and the cattle”***.

Environmental Degradation

This is a persistent decrease in the productivity and the natural quality of the environmental set up and the resources therein that results in severe shortages of life supporting resources, malnourishment, hunger, starvation, famine, rampant diseases and epidemics, prolong drought, flooding and other rampant disasters and catastrophes. Of serious concern, is that environmental degradation does not recognize national borders and political ideologies. Capitalism and socialism do not exist for ecosystems, and there are no such things as development and underdevelopment. All there is; is the effect on the environment of these things.

Under Islamic teaching, environmental degradation depicts and represents the consequences of human misuse of the resources endowed to him by the Allah (SWT); corrupt behaviour; unjust relation; greed nature; haste and impatient manner; and non devotion and submission to the rules of Allah (SWT). All these factors that induce ecological disorder have been frown in the Holy Qur'an as mischief (*israf*) and evil (*fasad*). In Suratul Layl Chapter 92 verses 5 to 11 Allah (SWT) says:

“So he who gives (in charity) and fear (Allah), And (in all sincerity) testifies to be the Best, - We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Ease. But he who is a greedy miser and thanks himself self sufficient, And gives the lie to the Best, - We will indeed make smooth for him the Path to Misery. Nor will his wealth profit him when he falls headlong (into the Pit)”

Also in Suratul Baqara Chapter 2 verses 205 and 226, Allah (SWT) says respectively: ***“No sooner do they leave than they hasten to commit evil in the land, destroying crops and cattle. Allah does not love evil”*** and ***“Eat and drink of what Allah has provided and don't act corruptly making mischief on the earth”***. Similarly, Suratul Ar-Rum Chapter 30 verse 41 reveals that ***“Evil has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of people have earned”***. While another verse in Suratul Ash-Shura contained that: ***“And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned”*** (Q42:30).

To sum up this ugly face of our environmental neglects, especially in developing countries of Africa South of the Sahara is responsible for the growing conflicts, social unrest and general insecurity of both life and property. In the Northeastern Nigeria for example, as a result of depletion of land and water resources brought about by intensified aridity and resource degradation, conflict over access to land and water resources between and among crop cultivators, pastoralist and fishermen is an annual phenomenon. As a result of this, several hundreds of human and animal lives and property worth several millions of Naira are lost annually.

This reality shows the fact that man is not fulfilling his mandate; as Allah (SWT) commanded man to live in harmony with nature. Allah (SWT) says in Suratul Al-A'raf:

“Call on your lord, humbly and secretly. He loves not transgressors. Do not do corruption in the land after it has been set right. Call upon Him in awe and eagerly. Surely the grace of Allah is right to the good-doers. It is He Who loses the winds, bearing good tidings before His grace, till, when they are charged with heavy clouds, We drive it to a dead land and use it to send down water and bring forth all fruits (from the soil). Even so, We shall bring forth the dead. Hopefully you will remember. And the good land's vegetation comes forth by the leave of its Lord, and the corrupt (land's vegetation) comes forth but scantily. Even so We turn about signs for the people who are thankful.” Q7: 55 – 58.

Therefore, the medication to the gloomy face of environmental degradation based on the teaching and practice of Islam is to conceive the 'guidance' of the Holy Qur'an, complete devotion and submission to the rules of Allah (SWT). For, such would allow man to act just, humble, harmonious, considerate, responsible, and compassionate in any matter relating to his dear fellow human being, group, society, community and the entire nature. This is revealed in Suratul Yunus Chapters 10 verse 9 and 10 and Suratul An-Nur: 24 verse 55, respectively:

“Those who believe and work righteousness their Lord will guide them because of their faith: Beneath them will flow Rivers and gardens of Bliss (This will be) their prayer therein: Glory be to thee, O Allah! And “Peace” will be their greeting therein and the end of their prayer will be praised be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds”

and

“Allah has promised to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will of a surely grant them in the land, inheritance (of power) as He granted it to those before them, that He will establish in authority their religion – the one which He has chosen for them, and that He will change (their state) after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace; They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me; if any do reject faith after, they are rebellious and wicked”.

Conventionally, however, the unified measures to the contemporary crisis of environmental degradation are sustainable development and environmental management. Even these, if one takes a careful look of the message and knowledge contained in the Holy Qur'an, he can deduce that they are rooted into the teaching and practice of Islam. In both the paradigm of sustainable development and environmental management the common basic principles underlining them are: efficient legislation; adequate planning and monitoring; community participation; moderate consumption; and implementation (regulated enforcement). All these featured in the teaching and practice of Islam. The following verses portray and serve as a testimony. Legislation: ***“And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but transgress not the limit. Allah likes not the transgressors”*** and ***“And do not with your own hands cast yourselves into destruction”*** Q2:190 & 195 respectively and Q4:43 reveals: ***“O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade among you by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves”***. Moderate Consumption: ***“... So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah, and do neither evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth”*** Q2:60.

These measures to say the least sustain and enhance the supply of life supporting resources, ensure food security, generate innovation, facilitate economic and social development, guarantee security of life and property, and lay the foundation of peace in the society.

III. PEACE

Peace and security are the prerequisite for development, and all human beings aspire and deserve them. It is only with peace that, people aspire for happiness and a quality of life devoid of poverty and indignity. Tolerance, therefore, is conventionally the threshold of measuring peace, thus if a community or society has a high level of tolerance with regards to socioeconomic stress, cultural differences, ethical variability, and religious norms and values, such community is said to be peaceful. Nevertheless, among the basic factors that erode tolerance and eventually forced community or society into confusion and chaos thereby leading to unpeaceful coexistence and insecurity include: hunger, poverty, ignorance, decay of moral values, greed, corruption, and lack of good guidance or leadership among others. Ironically, all these social ill, featured more in a degraded environments or invariably environmental degradation accentuated them more. Indeed, this potent fact is a current reality of many areas in Nigeria, notably among them are the far Northeastern zones of Nigeria and the Niger Delta areas of the Southern Nigeria.

However, based on Islamic perspectives, peace is attained with good guidance, since human community is a collection of individuals with unique and peculiar rights, interest, and desire; as well as collective interest and aspiration, thus conflict is inevitable. Therefore in order to have a peaceful atmosphere prevails in human community, humanity needs to be governed by a just, balanced, upright, and sublime code of conduct. The source of this guidance is the Holy Qur'an. It is so because man given his weaknesses and shortcomings he is not competent and capable enough to provide for himself a code of conduct or law, which is perfect, sublime, and upright that can guarantee enduring happiness, prosperity and peace to humanity. This has been clearly stated in Suratul Yunus verses 35 and 36, where Allah (SWT) says:

Say: “Of your partners is there any that can give any guidance towards Truth? Say: It is Allah Who gives guidance towards Truth, Is then Who gives guidance towards Truth. Is then Who gives guidance to Truth more worthy to be followed or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you? How judge ye? But most of them follow nothing but conjecture: truly conjecture can be of no avail against Truth. Verily Allah is all aware of what they do”.

Conversely, peace is attained when humanity turns to the will of Allah (SWT) and accepts and absolutely obeys His orders, then it can have lasting prosperity and felicity and if otherwise, humanity shall be thrown into misery and sadness. Suratul Ta-Ha Chapter 20 verses 123 and 124 stated that:

“He said: Get ye down both of you – all together from the Garden with enmity one to another but if as is sure there comes to you Guidance from me whosoever follows my guidance will not loose his way nor fall into misery. But whosoever turns away from my message verily for him is a life narrowed down and we shall raise him blind in the Day of judgment”.

Based on the practice of Islam, the Holy Qur'an is the source of universal guidance and peace. It has lasted for about fifteen (15) centuries, yet its originality has not been distorted or interpolated, thus this alone serves as a proof that It is the Book of Allah (SWT). A more solid evidence is stated in Suratul Yunus Chapter 10 verse 37: ***“This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than Allah, On the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book – wherein there is no doubt – from the Lord of the World”***.

On a more practical ground, individuals, communities, and nations that strictly live and go by the teaching of the Holy Qur'an live in a sustained peace and security.

IV. HUMAN SECURITY

Human security implies, as a minimum, a number of interwoven dimensions centred on respect for human dignity. These include: i) personal and physical security: the right of individuals and communities to preserve their own life and health and to dwell in a safe and sustainable environment; ii) economic security: access to employment and to the resources necessary to maintain one's existence, with adequate measures taken to reduce mal-distribution and artificial scarcity and to permit improvements in the material quality of community life; iii) social security: providing protection from discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity or social status, combined with access to safety nets, knowledge and information as well as freedom to associate; iv) political security: guaranteeing the right to representation, autonomy (freedom), participation and dissent, combined with empowerment to make choices and a reasonable probability of effecting change; v) legal-judicial security: individual and collective access to justice and protection from abuse; and vi) ethnic and cultural security: a social climate in which minority populations feel secure in expressing their cultural identity.

Human dignity and its paraphernalia can not be achieved where mutual antagonism, hostility and social injustice thrive. Islam not only preaches against them but also set down deterrent penalties to redress offenders. In the first instance, Islam does not and never ever recognizes racism, ethnicity and tribalism. In the sight of Allah (SWT) all Muslims are one, the most exalted is the most righteous. This is contained in Suratul Al-Hujurat Chapter 49 verse 13:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all the things)”.

Rasulullah (SAW) in His Farewell Pilgrimage sermon affirmed that: ***“There is no superiority for an Arab man over an Ajmi (Non-Arab) and vice-versa. All of you are from Adam and Adam was made of clay”.*** In both the teaching and practice of Islam, justice, fairness, kindness, and sympathy are central as opposed to hostility, greed, oppression, mischief, and tyranny. Therefore, those that submit to Allah (SWT) through the guidance of Holy Qur'an, and uphold justice, Allah (SWT) graces them with prosperity, peace and security, while those who rebel against and commit injustice, Allah (SWT) deal with them by either destroying them; withdrawing His favour or punish them with terror, affliction, hunger, and insecurity. May Allah (SWT) have mercy on us; indeed, this is the prevailing situation in Nigeria and many African countries. This is contained in Suratul Baqara Chapter 2 verse 61:

“They were covered with humiliation and misery: they drew on themselves the wrath of Allah. This is because they went on rejecting the signs of Allah and slaying His messengers without just cause. This is because they rebelled and went on transgressing”.

Similarly Suratul Al-Imran Chapter 3 verse 4 reveals that:

“Before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between the right and wrong). Then those who reject Faith in the sight of Allah will suffer the severest chastisement and Allah is Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution”.

Again, Allah (SWT) says: ***“... It may be that your Lord may (yet) show mercy unto you; but if ye revert (to your sins), We shall revert (to Our punishments): And We have made hell a prison for those who reject (all faith)”*** Q17: 8.

V. THE STANDARD SCENARIO

From the foregoing conventional wisdom and Islamic interpretation of Environmental Degradation, Security and Peace, one can deduced that there exists a strong linkage between and among them. As peace and security can brings about environmental recovery so also a well managed environment can promote and enhance peace and security and vice-versa. From the Islamic point of view, the ever lasting solution to the problem of environmental degradation and social insecurity and breach of peace, especially under the prevailing situation in Nigeria, is absolute submission to the will of Allah (SWT) and a complete change in our attitudes from that of injustice to just, fraud to honesty, tyrant to compassionate, and prejudiced to tolerant. Indeed, it has been clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an that environmental degradation is a miserable disaster (devilish) and does not thrive along with peace and security (benevolence) unless with its devilish counterpart (tyranny and pandemonium). This entails that for us to achieve peace and security in Nigeria we should and must divorce away from all vices that can leads to ecological disorder, act rightly and be guided by Who gives Guidance (Allah SWT). Some of the few verses sited earlier attest to this:

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, therefore, it can be concluded that environmental degradation in itself is a threat to security and peace, particularly if one takes a careful look of the current Nigerian situation characterized by rampant civil unrest, massive killings and lootings, severe shortages of basic life supporting resources, inefficient infrastructure and dwindling economy. Mostly where these nasty occurrences prevail, one could realise one form of ecological disorder or the other does exist or is taking place. The backbone to this is usually poverty accentuated by ecological imbalance. So at this juncture, it could be recommended that governments efforts toward poverty alleviation should radically reviewed and grossly improved, our leaders should fear Allah and be honest in the discharge of their duties, environmental regeneration, preservation, and conservation should be considered not only as an act of worship but also a civic responsibility to all Nigerians and any other person living in Nigeria, and as well security and peace should be treated in the same proportion and respect. Alhamdulillah, may Allah (SWT) forgive me for my shortcomings (errors and mistakes) and may the right message contained in this paper benefits humanity, Amin. Wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullah.

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