

# Islamic Unity Week and Milad Al-Nabi Celebration in Africa

By Abdullah R. Makwinja

Every year millions of Muslims across the globe celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Sunni and Shia denominations celebrate this event on two different dates within the same week. The interval between these two dates is annually commemorated as Islamic Unity Week which was initiated in the year 1979, by the founder of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini. It is called Week of Unity so that Muslims from both schools of thought

can come together to honor the memory of the noblest of all human beings ever to grace the face of the earth. This is the period in which Muslims contemplate the vital call for unity according to the Holy Quran.

This spirit of Islamic unity was shown by 'Allamah Sharaf al-Din al-Musawi who ruled that the Shiites of Lebanon should celebrate the birth of the Prophet (PBUH) on the same day as the Sunnis. Imam Khomeini took this a step further

by declaring Islamic Unity week. Sayyid al-Sistani has also taken praiseworthy steps to promote peace and brotherhood between all Muslims and to help foster unity amongst the Sunni and Shi'a brethren. Muslims all over the world realize that it is only unity and solidarity that can enable them to utilize their vast untapped potential and rescue them from the never-ending devious plots of their enemies around the world. The message of unity is a signal of



the fact that Muslims need to rise above their shallow differences and be heedful of the malicious intentions of external forces.

The Almighty Allah states clearly in the Holy Qur'an, 48:29 "Muhammad is Allah's Prophet; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding toward all deniers of the truth, (yet) full of mercy toward one another"

"The believers in their mutual

mutual respect, and cooperation.

Unity is a cherished ideal that every Muslim must strive for at all times, especially today when sectarianism is deliberately promoted to create divisions in the Ummah. Regrettably, attempts at division have succeeded to some extent causing immense suffering in the Muslim world. The enemies of Islam - imperialists and Zionists - fear Muslim unity. They know that if the

mean Muslims should give up removing misunderstandings or abandon the quest for unity. There is no better starting point than the birthday of the noble Messenger (PBUH).

Muslims should also rise above differences of race, color, language, and sect and strive for the larger goal of Muslim unity as exemplified by the composition of the early Muslim community which comprised not only Arabs but great companions from Africa represented by Bilal, Persia represented by Salman and Europe represented by Suhayb.

From this point of view, globalization should be seen as a possibility for the growth and advancement of human good principles, as it has transformed communicative technologies and enabled citizens across the world with swift and unified connectivity. According to this approach, globalization is an appropriate opportunity to develop exalted global Islamic unity.

Muslims should take advantage of globalization. Globalization is not first all about money, market, or competition, but about people and their interconnectedness. With the advances of rapid transportation, instant information, and communication, the world, is converting into a global village; the distance and difference are changing substantially and speedily and becoming irrelevant. The line of demarcation between diverse cultures and civilizations, in the ever-shrinking world, is said to be becoming blurred. This has enabled Muslims to witness every event taking place everywhere in the world be it the oppression of Palestinians by the Zionist or celebrations of happy



love, mercy, and compassion, are like one body. If one organ complained, the rest of the body develops fever"; Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Islamic unity doesn't mean that there will never be differences of opinion among Muslims of course not. It is only normal that we sometimes see things differently. However, Muslims' unity does mean that, in spite of these differences which sometimes occur, we'll be careful to maintain a spirit of love,

Muslims were united, their plots would fail. The imperialists and Zionists would no longer be able to exploit the Muslim world or its resources. Islam's enemies succeed not because they have superior ideas but because they have penetrated the world of Islam imposing their own agents as rulers, who implement their masters' agenda.

The disrupters are often more successful than unifiers because it is easy to create doubts in the minds of people. This does not

occasions such as Milad al-Nabi in Africa or elsewhere in the world.

Milad Nabi is celebrated in almost all Muslim countries and communities throughout the world. The occasion is celebrated in a festival manner, large street processions are held and homes or mosques are decorated. Charity and food are distributed, and stories about the life of Muhammad are narrated with recitation of poetry by children. However, the main significance of these festivities is the expression of love for Prophet Muhammad.

In Nigeria and other West African Muslim communities, Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) birthday is referred to as "Eid al-Maulud". This is one of the most important public holidays in Nigeria. In most parts of Nigeria, a procession comprising men, women, and children, choose a starting point and march towards a central mosque. The procession is usually so long that it is impossible to see the beginning and the end. Christian neighbors are never left out of the parties, as they are usually served from the party buffet.

In Ghana, Eid Milad un Nabi is a time for both celebration and sober reflection. This is when faithful Muslims in the country come together to pray, especially for peace to reign in the world. The attendees usually include well-placed Muslims in Ghana, as well as other invited dignitaries.

In Kenya and other east African Muslim communities, Eid Milad un Nabi brings Muslims together. Like in most African countries, those who celebrate the birth of Prophet Mohammed join a vibrant and colorful procession that culminates

in a mosque. Kenyan dignitaries usually make up the frontlines of the procession. Children recite special poems and Qasidas they had learned just for the occasion. After prayers, a well-respected Muslim leader enjoins everyone to respect the Faith and strive to co-exist peacefully with others.

In Zimbabwe and southern African Muslim communities, Milad un Nabi is usually referred to as

and its community the opportunity to host the birthday anniversary of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The host Mosque comes alive during the celebrations. The Ziyarat Nabi celebrations are vibrant and electric because of the spiritual chants by those participating in the festivities. To keep the reason for the celebrations in sight, poetry chronicling the life of Prophet Mohammed is also featured heavily. Indeed, it is



Ziyarat Nabi and is celebrated with all beautiful poems and songs in praise of the Holy Prophet with all Islamic schools of thought together. The celebration is at most times done all night, in which a few selected Sheikhs give lectures on the birth and life of the Holy Prophet. The celebrations are held throughout the Islamic calendar ending with the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. The philosophy behind the long celebration is to give every Islamic center

a time of joy, happiness, and sober reflections. Fairs are erected outside mosques to accommodate food stalls.

During these celebrations, Muslims try to inculcate the beautiful attribute of "mercy towards one another" by developing a clearer understanding of the Qur'an and the history of the Holy Prophet (SAAW). This is a way of cementing the bond which already exists within the Muslim communities.