

# Services of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Sunnis; Unity in Practice

The unity and proximity among Islamic schools of thought have always been one of the slogans of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran is of strong belief that religion, school of thought, and ethnicity should not cause differences. Rather, according to Islamic teachings, the value of a person is based on piety.

The aim of Islamic Unity Week (proposed by the late Imam Khomeini) is to explore the commonalities of Muslims, which are much greater than their differences. One example is the blessed being of the Messenger of Mercy, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in whom all Muslims believe. Unity Week carries this important message that if there is a difference between Muslims, it is to the extent of difference over the birthdate of the Holy Prophet, and such a thing cause a difference.

Speaking of unity is beautiful and pleasant when it is manifested in action. Practical unity is realized when there is no discrimination between

Sunni and Shia; between Persians, Arabs, Turks, Baloch, Kurds and Turkmens, etc.

The services of the Islamic Republic to the border areas with the majority of Sunnis are a sign of the attention of the officials to practical unity. These services encompass cultural schools of thought and economic development. For instance, countless mosques have been built in Sunni areas. Although like in the case of Shia mosques, the construction of these mosques has been done by the people, in many cases, the land of the mosques has been provided by the authorities. As a result of the cooperation of the system with the Sunni Muslims of Iran today there are more than 17 thousand Sunni mosques in Iran. According to statistics, the per capita share of Sunnis with regard to mosques is more than that of the Shiites.

Regarding the services of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sunnis in the area of mosques, Maulavi Abdul Samad Karim Zaei, Friday Prayer

Imam of Iranheshar and principal of Khadijah Al-Kabri School says: Before the Revolution, there were 5 mosques in Iranshahr, and now, thanks to the Revolution and the Islamic government, there are 135 mosques in this city.

The religious freedom that the Islamic Republic of Iran has given to the Sunnis is not limited to building a mosque and rather, Sunni religious schools have also received a large share. Currently, several thousand students are studying in Sunni seminaries. This fact is better perceived when the number of students and seminaries is compared with before the revolution. For example, before the revolution, there were only 3 religious seminaries in Sistan and Baluchistan province and this number has increased to more than 220 in which more than 22,000 students are studying. Darul Uloom Zahedan is one of the religious schools of Sistan and Baluchistan province. This school had 60 students before the revolution and presently more

than two thousand students are studying there.

Mamusta (teacher) Mohammad Amin Rasti, a member of the Planning Council of Ahl al-Sunnah religious schools and the interim Friday Prayer imam of Sanandaj, says: The Islamic Republic of Iran has established Sunni seminaries to address the concerns of Sunni students' livelihood, and the seminary service center supports the Sunni students with such services as life insurance, supplementary insurance, marriage loans, etc. Furthermore, equipping schools with computers and libraries, and paying stipends to teachers and students is also on the agenda.

The amount of stipend determined for Sunni students is not less, if not more, than that of Shia seminary students, and with the facilities provided, Sunni students can continue their education up to the Ph.D. level.

In the field of culture, too, Sunni areas have grown significantly. Today, the level of education among Sunnis of Iran has increased greatly. A large number of young people are engaged in higher education at the best universities of the country. Presently, there are more than 26,000 school classrooms and about 700,000 students in Sistan and Baluchistan province. In this province, about seven million books to the value of 220 billion Rials are distributed free of charge among Sunni students every year. This is despite the fact that before the revolution, the level of education in this province was very low.

In terms of infrastructure, too, Sistan and Baluchistan province has made good progress compared to before the revolution. Among these developments, mention can be made of the construction of as-

phalt roads and railways. Sistan and Baluchistan province has also been blessed with natural gas supplies by the current government.

In terms of insurance and health care, too, Sistan and Baluchistan province has experienced considerable growth in the post-revolution era. Presently, 2,300,000 people in Sistan and Baluchistan are covered by health insurance, of which 1,600,000 are rural and nomadic who are insured by the government free of charge. In addition to villagers and nomads, 300,000 deprived people living in the cities of Sistan and Baluchistan have also been issued free health insurance booklets so that they can benefit from medical services like other insured people.

Nabi Bakhsh Davoudi, the governor of Iranshahr and the deputy governorate of Sistan and Baluchistan, says about the services of the Islamic Revolution to the people of Sistan and Baluchistan province: The fatherly view of the Supreme Leader and the optimistic view of the government towards this province - which is evidenced

by the President's four visits to the province in recent years - confirm this issue. Currently, many big and small projects are being handled in the province, which has created a very bright horizon for the development and future of this region. These include projects like the expansion of railways, natural gas for domestic use, petrochemicals of Chabahar, further development of ports, airport, transit system, development of universities, and irrigation projects.

All these services are in alignment with the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran for promoting unity in practice. The importance of the development of deprived Sunni areas has been one of the main concerns of officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Supreme Leader has in this regard said:

After the victory of the revolution, I was commissioned by the late Imam (RA) to travel to Sistan and Baluchistan province to see the situation.

I paid a visit to the various regions of this province and sensed my duty toward this province. I sat with the people of these regions and I even went into their huts and got to know the pains and sufferings that they had gone through during the previous regime. Thereafter, work began and Construction Jihad and volunteer groups started working in these areas. Today's youth of Zahedan, Iranshahr, Chabahar, and Zabol do not know what was the condition of this province like in the pre-revolution era. If the terrible life condition of this province in the past can get depicted, it becomes clear what great and precious services the Islamic system has done in this region.

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