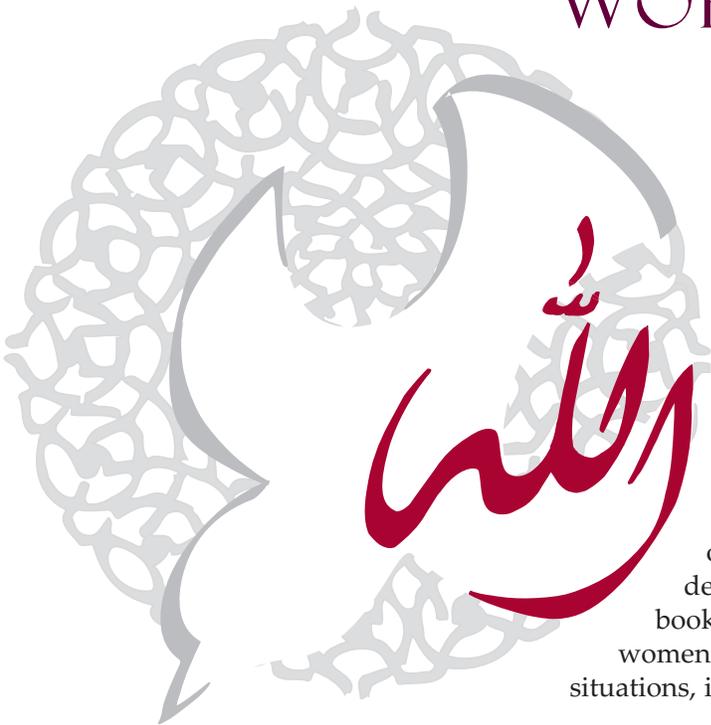


# THE QUR'AN *and* WORKER JUSTICE



The Muslim community and the labor movement share the common goals of social justice, economic fairness, and fair treatment in the workplace. In fact, the history of Islam is rooted in a firm stand against economic exploitation. When Prophet Muhammad ibn (son of) Abdullah, *may Allah be pleased with Him*, began teaching Islam in Mecca, it shook up an unjust economic structure that allowed the rich to take advantage of the poor. Before Prophet Muhammad departed, he left behind The Holy Qur'an, a book filled with guidance on how men and women should treat each other in various situations, including the workplace.

The Holy Qur'an urges the proper treatment and respect of workers. Several Muslim leaders discussed the relevance of the Holy Qur'an to the struggle for dignity in the workplace with union leaders and other religious leaders during the "Islam and Labor: Forging Partnerships Conference," held Nov. 10, 2001, in Washington, D.C. Co-convened by Interfaith Worker Justice and the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the conference sought to build relationships between the Muslims, interfaith committees and labor communities.

Referencing heavily from the Holy Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad, several Muslim Imams (leaders) discussed worker justice, the connection between faith and works, class and gender equality, and the responsibility of employers. The essence of their remarks can be summed up in one sentence uttered by Prophet Muhammad to his companions about 1400 years ago:

**"None of you has faith unless you love for your brother what you love for yourself."**

The Imams pledged to work with organized labor to secure economic justice for low-wage workers in America. This booklet is a result of the dialogue and highlights key themes discussed during the conference.

## Standing Together for Worker Justice

Qur'an – (k̄-ran', -rān' also spelled Koran, Quran, Alkoran) is the holy scripture revealed by Allah (God) to Muhammad ibn Abdullah. The word Qur'an literally means readings or recitations. These revelations consist of verses (*ayat*) grouped into 114 chapters (*suras*).

In Islam, it is neither a person's wealth, gender, or ethnicity that makes them a better person. "Islam teaches that the best in God's sight are those that stand for righteousness," said Imam Mahdi Bray. "To me, that signals a commonality of the human spirit regardless of our faith tradition, ethnicity, social status." The Holy Qur'an calls on all of humanity to stand for justice and to work together to ensure that people are treated fairly. "This alliance that we're working to build, reinforcing a traditional relationship between labor and religion, is needed now probably more than ever," said Imam Johari Abdul-Malik, Director of Outreach for the Dar Al Hijrah Islamic Center in Northern Virginia. "Workers being laid off are looking to the traditional sources of support – labor unions, the church, the synagogue, the mosque and other community service organizations – to fill the gap that's being created by some of these (corporations). We have to be together with labor. We have to be on the picket line. We have to be before Congress and organizing workers around the country to fight against this consolidation of wealth."

This statement reflects a core teaching of Islam. Muslims are told to strive for justice – even "against your own self" and to establish justice coalitions that transcend faith. Prophet Muhammad discussed this very idea.

"One day a trader came to do business in Mecca (a major place of

trade at the time), but was wronged by a businessman who didn't pay him his money. The trader stood on a mountain and he cried out for justice. When he cried out, people of Mecca decided to create an alliance that transcended tribal and religious barriers to fight for the rights of those wronged. Before Muhammad Ibn Abdullah received revelation and became a prophet, he joined this coalition and after becoming a prophet, he said to one of his companions, 'I was called to this coalition before I became a prophet and if somebody called me today to stand for what is just and address issues of equality and fairness with people of different backgrounds, I would respond,'" said Imam Mohamed Magid of the Washington, D.C.-based ADAMS Center. "One of the missions of a Muslim is to work with those who work for justice."

- O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor.... *Holy Qur'an 4:135*
- The Messenger of Allah said, "Help thy brother whether he is the doer of wrong or wrong is done to him." His companions said, "O Messenger! We can help a man to whom wrong is done, but how could we help him when he is the doer of wrong?" He said: "Take hold of his hand from doing wrong." *Manual of Hadith*

Imam Johari Abdul-Malik,  
Imam Makram El-Amin,  
and Imam Mohamed Magid



## Faith, Works, and Dignity

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The idea of “faith and good works” is a theme highlighted often throughout the Holy Qur’an. Though there are some spiritual connotations, it also refers to the duties and responsibilities placed on people to earn a living by contributing to society and taking care of their families. In general, Muslims are encouraged to work hard and be honest.

“With works comes dignity,” said Imam Makram El-Amin of Minnesota. “No one enjoys a meal more than a person who actually gives their time, effort, and labor to go out and to provide a way, to take care of themselves and their families.” In Islamic tradition, every profession, organization, corporation, and union of service oriented or trade workers should be established with the purpose of serving humanity. Therefore, all are regarded with dignity and honor. This principle is also revealed in the hadith (sayings) of Prophet Muhammad Ibn Abdullah who viewed all professions honorably and taught those who followed him to do the same. Even the humblest of work

carries with it dignity, as long as one’s worldly pursuit does not take them away from remembrance of God.

- No one eats better food than that which he eats out of the work of his hand. *A Manual of Hadith*
- They believe in Allah and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: they are in the ranks of the righteous. *Holy Qur’an 3:114*
- And those who believe and whose seeds follow them in Faith – to them shall We join their families: nor shall We deprive them (of the fruit) of aught of their works: (yet) is each individual in pledge for his deeds. *Holy Qur’an 52:21*
- O ye messengers! Enjoy (all) things good and pure, and work righteousness: for I am well-acquainted with (all) that ye do. *Holy Qur’an 23:51*
- It is these who hasten in every good work, and these who are foremost in them. *Holy Qur’an 23:61*

Hadith – is the record of an individual saying or action or approvals of Muhammad taken as a model of behavior by Muslims. The word *hadith* literally means communication or narrative. The sayings and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad are called *hadith*. These are explanations, interpretations, and the living examples of the Prophet. His sayings are found in books called the *Hadith*, which have been compiled into different books by various authors. Some famous collectors of *hadith* are Imam Al-Bukhari, Imam An-Nasa’i, and Imam Majah.

## Equality

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One of the tools used by Prophet Muhammad and his companions to end the unjust economic system in Mecca, Arabia, was to teach the concept of equality. During that time in Mecca there was a large underclass of slaves who served the rich. Prophet Muhammad made it clear that all are equal. The same concept is relevant today.

“Prophet Mohammed and his companions ended slavery in Arabia. We now have what some people would call wage slavery,” said Imam Abdul-Malik. “The first step of ending slavery (in Arabia) was to say that the slave is equal to the master. Once there is the idea that the slave, or today, the worker, is equal to the master (or employer) that becomes the unraveling of this and other forms of discrimination. We all

have rights. No matter whether you are working in the corporate penthouse, or down in the basement sorting the mail, all people have rights. They’re equal before their Lord.” This principle speaks to class, race and gender differences.

- Men shall have the benefit of what they earn, and women shall have the benefit of what they earn. *Holy Qur’an 4:32*
- I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female, the one of you being from the other. *Holy Qur’an 3:194*
- O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other)...*Holy Qur’an 49:13*

## Employer Responsibility

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The Holy Qur'an teaches that people should "fulfill all of your obligations," said Imam El-Amin. "An employer is obligated to properly compensate, which is not just about money. We're talking about providing a good atmosphere; good working conditions, benefits, and allowing a person to have time with their families." In Islam, perfect honesty is enjoined in all business transactions, including how an employer treats an employee. Those who are in a better financial position and employ others have more responsibility to ensure that they treat people with fairness, remembering that all humanity is one.

This principle in Islam is displayed during the annual Hajj (pilgrimage) ritual where people from all walks of life come together shedding their traditional ethnic clothing, jewelry, and all other articles that reveal different levels of social status. This helps to demonstrate that God is the God of all, rich and poor.

"Muhammad the Prophet said, 'Pay the worker while the sweat is still on the brow.' This speaks of timely compensation," said Imam El-Amin.

- Give full measure when you measure out and weigh with a fair balance. This is fair and better in the end. *Holy Qur'an 17:35*
- When you hire, compensate the workers and treat them fairly. *A Manual of Hadith*
- Woe to those that deal in fraud. Those who when they have to receive by measure, from men exact full measure, but when they have to give by measure, or weight to men, give less than due. *Holy Qur'an 83:1-3*
- Give just measure, and cause no loss (to others by fraud). *Holy Qur'an 26:181-183*



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