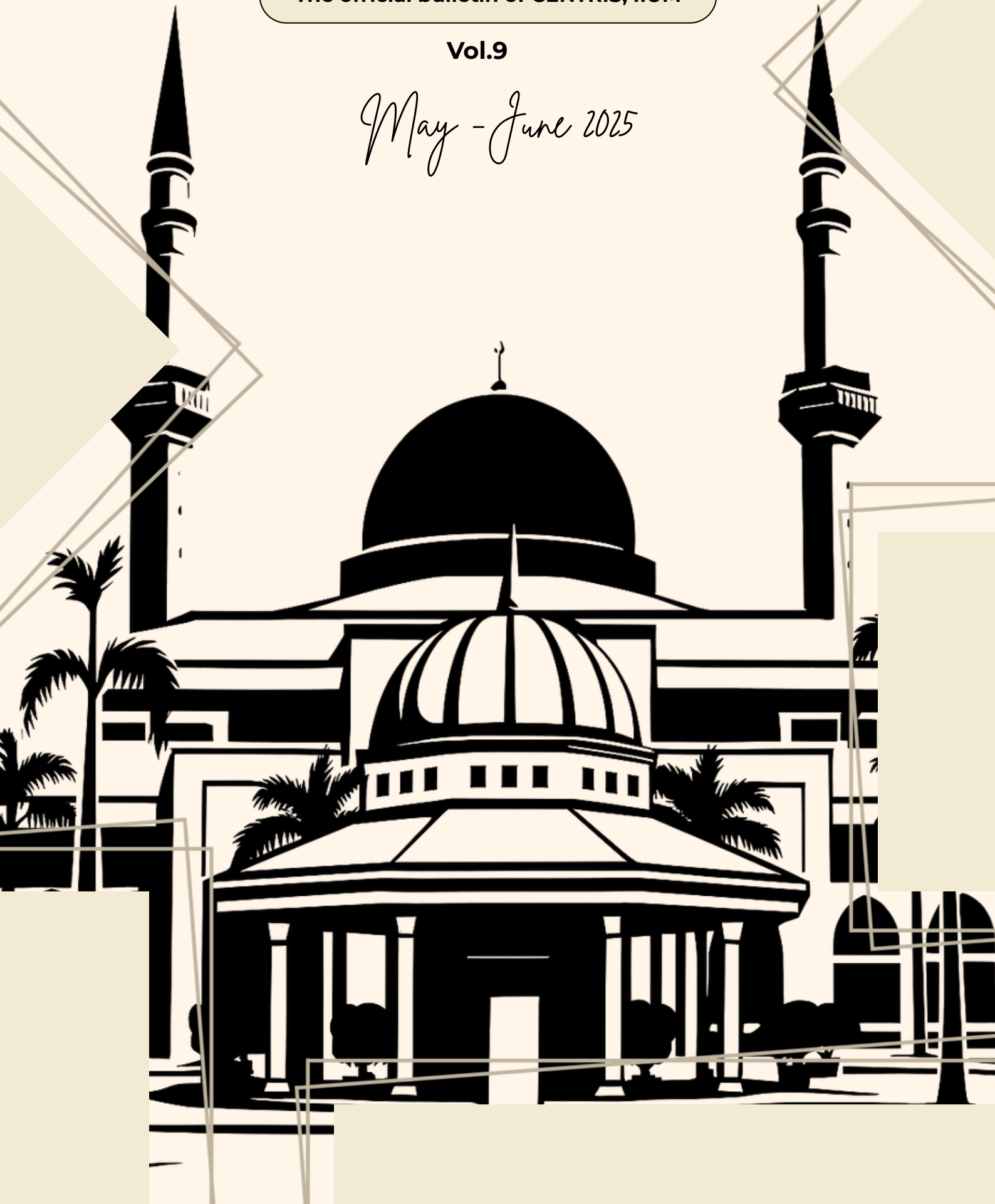


CENTRIS E-BULLETIN

The official bulletin of CENTRIS, IIUM

Vol.9

May - June 2025



CONTENTS

• Editor's Desk

- Agree To Disagree

1

• Reflection

- Between Hadhramaut and Kuala Lumpur: When Identity Rediscovered Itself

2

• Current Affairs

- Malaysia Humanitarian Assistance To Somalia
- The Humanitarian Crisis In Gaza
- Reclaiming the Muslim Narrative: TikTok's Disruption of Islamophobia and the Urgency of Media Sovereignty

5

9

16

• Event

22



Centre for Islamisation (CENTRIS)

Level 3 Administration Building
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Jalan Gombak 53100 Kuala Lumpur
Email: zahidzamri@iium.edu.my/
centris_reception@iium.edu.my
Phone: (+603) 6421 6797

CENTRIS E-bulletin is published bimonthly (bimestrial).



EDITORIAL



Director: Dato' Hamidon Abd Hamid
Editor: Dr. Zahid Zamri
Co-editor: Dr. Nur Jannah Hassan
Graphic Designer:
Sr. Saidatunnisa' Zainuddin
Sr. Aisyah Natasya Mohd Zaharami

AGREE TO DISAGREE

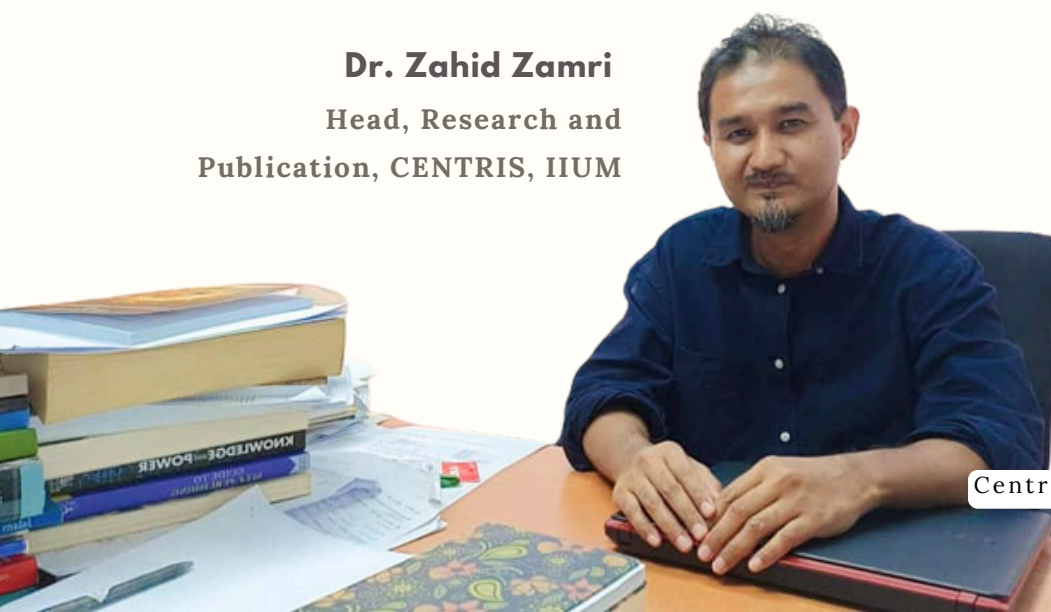
It is said that Voltaire once said: “*I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.*” This phrase encapsulates freedom of speech as a concept that should be defended even though we may not agree with the stance of the person who tries to voice out his/her thoughts. Such a radical democratic approach that allows freedom of speech will be able to avoid displeasure and vengeance that can lead to bloody conflicts because of constant suppression of the public sphere.

What is more, to have different opinions is a blessing. Around 2350 years ago, Aristotle, in outlining polity as the best governmental system, stressed that only through criticism can we move forward – which later became the foundation of modern science. According to him, if we do not allow criticism to take place, then we will always be at the status quo. Worst, for Karl Popper, the state will become a police state that will always monitor and punish those who try to criticize the authority. Winston Churchill in WW2, when the Nazis were approaching, had prevented the opposition leader from stepping down from the parliamentary seat as Churchill realized that he needed a person who could really criticize him so he could ensure that his ideas in saving the country had been thoroughly reviewed before they became war policies.

Nonetheless, there is a limit to such freedom of speech. Hate speech such as insulting, demeaning, belittling, cursing, sexist and racist remarks must not be allowed as these are against our moral and ethical principles. Again, on the flipside, failure to professionally deal with disagreement by forcefully dogmatically imposing our ideas on others is also not an accepted behaviour in Islam.

Dr. Zahid Zamri

Head, Research and
Publication, CENTRIS, IIUM



Between Hadhramaut and Kuala Lumpur: When Identity Rediscovered Itself

A Yemeni Student's Journey in Sociology and Anthropology Toward Understanding the Self and the Other

This essay is not a traditional scholarly analysis, but rather a reflective exploration of concepts such as identity and belonging. It uses autobiographical narrative as a lens and a tool to understand the self and the other in the context of the transition between Hadhramaut and Kuala Lumpur. I write while listening to the questions raised by migration and multiculturalism, and I seek to understand them through a vision that believes in the unity of knowledge and seeks a balance between the self and reality, without claiming comprehensiveness or finality

وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

﴿ “And also in your own selves. Do you not see?” – Qur'an. 51:21

“Man is social by nature.” – Ibn Khaldun

Everything began in Hadhramaut in its calm corners and alleys, where we learn more through embodied memory than from books. Belonging was taught through gatherings, food and honoring elders, and a sense of collective life rooted in faith and tradition. Then Kuala Lumpur came, not to make me forget what I knew, but to expand it. It taught me to see those familiar details with new eyes, not only as cultural practices but as rich layered human expressions.

I came to Malaysia as a student of sociology and anthropology, only to realize that I was not just studying society, I was being studied, and reshaped too. Every intercultural encounter, every lecture, pushed me to think deeper: Who have I been? Who am I now? Who am I becoming?

Yemeni Identity Through Memory

What does it mean to be Yemeni here? A small question, but it opens doors of deep reflection. In Malaysia, where dozens of cultures, languages, and religions coexist, I found a safe space to ask that question without fear. Belonging was no longer accepted as a given, but a conscious choice. Am I still the one who came from Hadhramaut? Or am I now a blend of cultures?

I'm often asked: "What is your culture? What is Yemen like?" And I find it not that easy to answer briefly or even decide where to begin. Yemen is not a single mold, but a mosaic of color, life, and diversity. From the quiet East of Hadhramaut to the mountain of Sana'a, from the rich culture of Taiz to the coastal openness of Aden, from the western plains of Tihama to the magical island of Socotra, each area carries its own soul.

Even our dialects carry ecosystems of meaning. Our dances, dishes, clothing—all reflect a landscape rich in diversity. And this diversity is not a challenge to unity—it is its foundation. To speak of "Yemeni culture" is to speak of layered belonging, and I found that my growing knowledge allowed me to honor this complexity without reducing it.

This diversity doesn't divide us—it enriches us. Talking about "Yemeni culture" becomes a rich conversation, not a single definition

Islam, Identity, and Intellectual Discovery

Sociology taught me to understand people without judgment. Anthropology taught me that behind every custom rests a worldview. But it was Islam that gave me a compass that doesn't erase cultural identity, but anchors it in Tawheed, purpose, and balance.

As I observed the cultures around me, I realized how Islam is not a singular aesthetic— it is a lived experience adapting to context. In Malaysia, Islam appears in unique social norms, just as it does in Hadhramaut. But the essence remains: community, mercy, remembrance, and justice.

The words of Ibn Khaldun echoed through my studies, when people share similar living conditions, their thoughts and morals grow closer." Knowledge, then, becomes not just a means of distinction—but of nearness. Sociology becomes a path toward empathy. Anthropology becomes a bridge across cultures. And Islam remains the thread that ties intention to understanding.

Anthropology Begins With the Self

To be an Arab Muslim in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society is to experience duality: we observe and are observed. We compare and are compared. Yet through that, I learned that the mirror we carry from our homelands is not a burden—it is a blessing. It teaches us to see more, not less.

I no longer see Hadhramaut as a "frozen memory" I now view it as a rich cultural text— open for reinterpretation, contextualized by distance, and appreciated anew through the lens of knowledge.

From Questioning to Becoming

In university, I met students from many nations—each carrying their own struggles and questions: What is success? Who defines fulfillment? Should we live as we wish or as others expect?

And I learned that these are not foreign questions. They are human ones. In that, I found solace. I didn't need to dissolve into the other, nor resist change. I only needed to grow—intellectually, spiritually, and personally

Conclusion: Who Am I?

I am a Yemeni student from Hadhramaut, living in Malaysia, studying sociology and anthropology. But this sentence now holds far more than geography or academic identity—it reflects a journey of consciousness. A journey shaped by faith, knowledge, distance, and return.

I write not because I hold answers, but because I have learned how to ask questions—questions that connect souls, awaken thought, and perhaps, in time, shape nations.

Sr. Bazyad Nofa Meteab Mubarak
AHAS KIRKHS



MALAYSIA'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO SOMALIA

When discussions arise about humanitarian aid, major donors such as the United States or the European Union often dominate the discourse. However, countries like Malaysia have also made significant contributions, particularly in nations facing severe crises such as Somalia, one of the world's most disaster-prone and conflict-affected countries. While Malaysia's efforts may not always receive widespread international attention, they have nonetheless had a meaningful impact on the ground.

This article examines Malaysia's humanitarian engagement with Somalia, highlighting the importance and challenges of such assistance.

A Bond Beyond Borders

Malaysia and Somalia may seem worlds apart, but they share something deeper: a common faith, values, and a shared history of struggle and resilience. Their diplomatic relationship dates back to 1960, soon after Somalia gained independence. Since then, Malaysia has stood by Somalia on the global stage, often voicing support for its sovereignty in forums like the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).^{1 2}

In 2013, this connection grew stronger. The two countries signed agreements to collaborate in education and development, and Somalia opened an embassy in Kuala Lumpur—hoping to build bridges with the rest of Southeast Asia.³ It was a step toward more than just diplomacy. It was a sign of trust.

Stepping In When It Matters Most

In 2017, when Somalia faced one of its worst droughts in recent history, Malaysia didn't look away. Instead, it sent a military aircraft loaded with food, medicine, and trained personnel. The mission, approved by Malaysia's Cabinet, was a lifeline for families struggling to survive with little access to water, food, or medical help.⁴

That mission wasn't a one-off gesture. Just two years ago, in 2023, Somalia's Prime Minister met with Malaysian High Commissioner to East Africa, Ruzaimi Mohamad in Mogadishu. They didn't just talk about aid—they spoke about building long-term cooperation in areas like education, trade, and health. It was a sign that Malaysia sees Somalia not just as a recipient of aid, but as a partner for the future.⁵

NGOs on the Ground, Making a Difference

Much of the real work happens far from the public eye—thanks to Malaysian NGOs that have boots on the ground. One of them, Islamic Relief Malaysia (IRM), has been focusing on one of Somalia's most basic and urgent needs: clean water. In 2023, IRM launched the Somalia Water Wakaf Fund, building wells in the Shabelle Region to help more than 10,000 people get access to safe, drinkable water.⁶ In a place where water can mean the difference between life and death, this is a game-changer.

Another incredible example is the Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA). What makes MRA's work stand out is its cultural sensitivity. During Ramadan, a sacred month for Muslims, they launched a Ramadan Bread Project, baking fresh bread for families every day. To some, that might seem like a small gesture. But for those receiving it, it meant dignity, familiarity, and care.⁷

MRA also runs long-term programs like building water pumps and distributing meat during Qurban and Aqiqah. These aren't just acts of charity—they're efforts rooted in tradition, trust, and a deep understanding of what communities need beyond just survival.

The Hard Truth: Aid Doesn't Always Reach Everyone

As inspiring as these efforts are, there's a tough question we have to ask: Is the aid reaching the people who need it most? Sadly, the answer is not always.

Somalia presents a highly challenging environment for aid distribution. Issues such as armed conflict, corruption, poor infrastructure, and political instability make it difficult to ensure that aid reaches its intended beneficiaries. A 2023 report by the United Nations revealed that significant portions of food, water, and medical supplies are often diverted.⁸ In some cases, it's so bad that international donors like the European Union have had to pause food aid entirely after discovering theft in displacement camps.⁹

And this is where Malaysia, like all humanitarian actors, faces a big challenge. It's not enough to send help. We need to make sure it actually gets there to the mothers trying to feed their children, the sick waiting for medicine, the communities relying on clean water.

Building Trust Through Accountability

The good news? Malaysia is in a strong position to do more. Many NGOs already use digital tools to track where aid goes and who receives it. But these tools need to be scaled up and adapted to the unique challenges in Somalia, where roads are bad, communication is patchy, and security is always a concern.¹⁰

By investing in monitoring, transparency, and local partnerships, Malaysia can make sure its contributions are not just generous, but effective. It's about building a system that people can trust—from the donors at home to the families on the ground in Mogadishu or Shabelle.

More Than Just Aid—A Lasting Impact

What Malaysia is doing in Somalia is more than just dropping off supplies. It's about building relationships, offering hope, and showing that even smaller nations can play a big role in global compassion. The clean water projects, the culturally respectful food programs, the diplomatic partnerships—these are all threads in a much larger fabric of support.

But for that fabric to hold, accountability has to be woven in. Aid that disappears helps no one. It wastes resources, erodes trust, and delays recovery.

Malaysia has already shown that it cares. Now, it's time to show that it can lead—by insisting that every bit of aid makes a difference, that every life touched is counted and valued.

Conclusion

Malaysia's humanitarian assistance to Somalia is a story of heart, action, and rising responsibility. The efforts made by both the government and NGOs have already brought relief to thousands. But if Malaysia truly wants to leave a lasting mark, the next step is clear: make sure every ringgit, every drop of water, every loaf of bread reaches those who need it most.

Because aid is not just about giving—it's about caring enough to make sure it works.



Br. Izzat Muhammad Haziq Kamarudzaman
AHAS KIRKHS

References

1. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). (n.d.). About the OIC. <https://www.oic-oci.org>
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia. (n.d.). Malaysia-Somalia relations. <https://www.kln.gov.my>
3. Somali Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2013). Somalia and Malaysia sign bilateral agreements. <https://mfa.gov.so>
4. Bernama News Agency. (2017). Malaysia sends humanitarian aid to Somalia. <https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=1366697>
5. Dalsan Editor. (2023). Somali PM and Malaysian High Commissioner Discuss strengthening bilateral relations. Radio Dalsan. <https://www.radiodalsan.com/somali-pm-and-malaysian-high-commissionerdiscuss-strengthening-bilateral-relations/>
6. Islamic Relief Worldwide. (2023). Somalia Water Wakaf Fund project. <https://www.islamic-relief.org>
7. Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA). (n.d.). Ramadan bread project and other humanitarian efforts. <https://www.mra.org.my>
8. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2023). Report on aid diversion in Somalia. <https://www.unocha.org>
9. European Commission. (2023). European Union halts food aid to Somalia amid diversion claims. <https://ec.europa.eu/echo>
10. ReliefWeb. (2023). Digital aid monitoring in Somalia. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia>

Sr. Aisyah Natasya Mohd Zaharami
AHAS KIRKHS



THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GAZA

Prologue

In Islam, the sanctity of human life and the duty to uphold justice and compassion are fundamental principles deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza is a painful reminder of the violation of these values, where innocent lives, especially women and children, are subjected to extreme suffering. As Muslims, we are reminded in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:32) that killing one innocent life is as though killing all of mankind, and saving one life is as though saving all of mankind. The crisis in Gaza demands not only political and humanitarian responses, but also a moral and spiritual awakening rooted in Islamic values of solidarity (*ukhuwwah*), justice (*'adl*), and mercy (*rahmah*). This study is a call to revive the Islamic ethical framework in viewing the tragedy in Gaza not merely as a conflict, but as a critical issue of human dignity, justice, and our collective responsibility as part of the ummah.



Source : Hamdi Yıldız, 2021

Introduction

The Israel-Palestinian conflict dates back to the late 1800s. In 1947, the UN adopted Resolution 181, also known as the Partition Plan, to establish separate Arab and Jewish states from the British Mandate of Palestine. The first Arab-Israel War began on May 14, 1948, the day Israel declared independence. Israel was victorious in 1949, but around 750,000 Palestinians fled their homes, and the land was divided into the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, also called the Jordan River, and Israel (Center for Preventive, 2025). Gaza is a small, densely populated area inhabited by over 2 million Palestinians, one of the most crowded places in the world. For years, Gaza residents have endured war, poverty, and shortages of necessities. Since October 2023, the crisis has worsened due to a new conflict sparked by Hamas, a Gaza-based group, attacking Israel, prompting Israel to launch heavy airstrikes and ground offensives. Many buildings in Gaza, including homes, schools, hospitals, and shops, have been destroyed or damaged. Most Gaza residents have been forced to leave their homes, often living in tents or overcrowded shelters. The humanitarian emergency in Gaza is now one of the most severe in recent history, with conflict causing widespread destruction, displacement, and the near-collapse of essential services. The situation deteriorated further after the ceasefire broke down in March 2025, leading to intensified military actions, resulting in tens of thousands of civilian casualties, extensive damage to infrastructure, and repeated forced displacements. Nearly everyone in Gaza needs immediate humanitarian aid. By mid-2025, around 1.9 million people, about 90% of Gaza's population, will have been displaced multiple times, living in overcrowded shelters, makeshift camps, or among destroyed neighborhoods. Access to food, clean water, and medical supplies is severely limited. The blockade and ongoing fighting hinder humanitarian aid delivery, leaving the population vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition.



Source : Afni Regita Cahyani Muis, 2024

Currently, Gaza is facing a severe and worsening humanitarian and military crisis. Since late 2023, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has caused extensive destruction, widespread casualties, and critical shortages of essential supplies. The war has generated humanitarian concerns beyond northern Gaza. Since Israel's operations began in 2023, multiple reports have documented the targeting of journalists, schools, and Israel designated humanitarian zones. Repeated Israel strikes on medical facilities, including hospitals and vital infrastructure, have led to a rise in diseases such as polio across the Strip. Violence against humanitarian workers has worsened the crisis. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health and UN reports (UNRWA, 2025), over 57,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 137,000 injured. Israel military operations have intensified, especially in the southern Rafah area, where over 28,600 buildings have been destroyed since early 2025. This destruction is part of a controversial plan by Israel to forcibly transfer up to 2 million Palestinians from Gaza to a designated humanitarian city or concentration zone in Rafah, effectively relocating the entire population under harsh conditions. The humanitarian situation remains dire. Fuel shortages have brought aid efforts close to collapse, severely restricting access to medical care, clean water, and food. Hospitals are overwhelmed, with nearly half functioning partially and lacking staff and supplies. Children are especially vulnerable, with thousands suffering from malnutrition and many dying or being injured while waiting for aid (Al Jazeera, 2025). However, aid delivery faces obstacles from blockades and security risks, and recent attempts to distribute food have been marred by deadly incidents, including airstrikes on civilians waiting in line for aid. The United Nations and humanitarian organizations have condemned these attacks and called for the protection of civilians and unrestricted humanitarian access (UN News, 2025). In summary, Gaza remains trapped in a cycle of violence, mass displacement, and humanitarian collapse, with civilians enduring extreme hardship, starvation, and ongoing danger amidst continuous military actions and restrictive policies.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN GAZA?



Source : UNWRA,2025



Source : Kathleen Magramo, Mitchell McCluskey & Jennifer Hansler, 2024



Source : Guardian News,2025

WHY IS IT CALLED A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS?

A situation is called a humanitarian crisis when the health, safety, or well-being of a large group of people is seriously threatened, and their needs become so overwhelming that they can no longer be met by their community's resources alone. These crises usually demand immediate, large-scale help from national and international organizations to save lives and reduce suffering. The main reasons for the breakdown are:

1. Massive Civilian Suffering and Casualties

- Over 57,000 Palestinians have been killed, most of them women and children, while more than 137,000 others have been injured. In addition, tens of thousands remain missing or are feared dead beneath the rubble. The destruction of infrastructure has been devastating, with over 90% of homes in Gaza either destroyed or severely damaged. As a result, many families are now forced to live in overcrowded makeshift shelters, tents, or the ruins of buildings, often without safety, privacy, or necessities (Al-Jazeera, 2025).

2. Forced Displacement

- Over 90% of residents, almost two million people, have been forced to flee their homes, many of them multiple times. With nowhere stable to go, people are crowded into unsafe and unsanitary shelters or left sleeping in the open with little to no protection from the elements (Schiavenza, 2025). There are no truly safe spaces remaining in Gaza. Civilian infrastructure, such as homes, schools, and hospitals, has been either bombed or repurposed for military use. Even areas labeled as safe zones are dangerously overcrowded and lack access to essential resources like food, water, and medical aid. As a result, people are left with few, if any, options for safety or survival.

3. Collapse of Essential Services

- Due to the ongoing conflict and blockade, food shortages have reached critical levels. Nearly half a million people are on the brink of starvation, while the entire population suffers from extreme hunger and malnutrition (WHO, 2025). Many families survive on just one poor-quality meal a day or none at all. However, they can't access to clean water is also extremely limited, with only a small portion of water infrastructure still functioning. As a result, 93% of households face water insecurity, which contributes to dehydration, the spread of waterborne diseases, and rising illness rates among children. Other than that, the healthcare system is nearing total collapse. Most hospitals and clinics have been destroyed or are barely operational. Medical professionals are overwhelmed and lack necessities such as medicine, electricity, and proper sanitation. Countless injuries remain untreated, and preventable diseases are spreading at an alarming rate.

The global response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza involves a combination of diplomatic, humanitarian, and grassroots actions. However, challenges and disagreements have led to limited progress and ongoing suffering for Gaza's population.

WHAT IS THE WORLD DOING?

1. Humanitarian Aid and International Action

- The United Nations, through agencies such as OCHA and UNICEF, along with non-governmental organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Red Cross, have been actively working to deliver essential humanitarian aid to Gaza. This includes providing medical supplies, food, clean water, and protection for civilians. However, their efforts are often hindered by severe access restrictions, with many aid convoys being delayed or denied entry altogether (IRC, 2025). In response to the worsening crisis, international organizations and numerous governments are strongly advocating for an immediate ceasefire. They emphasize that only a halt in hostilities will allow life-saving aid to reach those in desperate need and ensure the safety of civilians (IRC, 2025). At the diplomatic level, governments and international bodies continue to urge all parties to uphold international humanitarian law. They are calling for the establishment of humanitarian corridors, the release of hostages, and guarantees for the safety of displaced civilians (British Red Cross, 2025).



Source :IRC, 2025



Source: BDS,2015

2. Global Boycott Movement

- In response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the Global Boycott Movement, particularly the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, has gained significant traction across many countries. This grassroots movement calls for individuals and institutions to boycott products like Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and many more that are linked to the Israel government or military (BDS, 2025). It also urges universities, corporations, and pension funds to divest from such companies, and calls on governments to impose economic and political sanctions. The ultimate goal of the movement is to pressure Israel to change its policies regarding Gaza and the broader occupation, and to ensure compliance with international human rights and humanitarian laws. Across the globe, public protests have erupted, with millions of people taking to the streets to demand an immediate ceasefire, greater humanitarian assistance, and justice for Palestinian civilians. Many of these protests are organized by advocacy groups, student unions, and human rights organizations, which also promote boycotts as a peaceful and nonviolent form of resistance (United Nations, 2024). The impact of the boycott movement has been significant in terms of raising global awareness and applying economic and political pressure. In some cases, major corporations have faced public backlash and lost consumer support due to their perceived support of or ties to the Israeli government. However, the effectiveness of the movement in influencing official government policy remains mixed. While some governments and institutions have taken steps in line with the BDS demands, many others remain divided or hesitant to impose broad sanctions, often due to political alliances or economic considerations.

The crisis in Gaza is very serious. Many people there have lost their homes, don't have enough food or clean water, and are living in fear every day because of the war and blockades. Islam teaches us that every person has dignity and their life must be protected. Important Islamic values like protecting life (*Hifz Al-Nafs*) and property (*Hifz Al-Mal*) are being ignored in Gaza. Children, women, and families are suffering, and many are living in tents or broken buildings. Although some countries and organisations are helping, the situation is still very bad. As Muslims, we must care for others and show mercy (*rahmah*) and stand up for justice (*'adl*). We should feel close to the people of Gaza through Islamic brotherhood. To end this suffering, the world must stop the violence and follow the values of Islam by helping the people of Gaza live in safety and dignity once again.

References

- Afni Regita Cahyani Muis Dosen Prodi Hubungan Internasional. (2025, June 10). Economic forces are at play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/economic-forces-are-at-play-in-israeli-palestinian-conflict-221410>
- Al Jazeera. (2025, March 23). “horrific milestone”: Israel’s war on Gaza has killed 50,000 Palestinians. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/23/israeli-offensive-in-gaza-has-killed-50000-palestinians-since-october-2023>
- Campaigns. BDS Movement. (2015, August 31). <https://bdsmovement.net/campaigns>
- Center for Preventive Action. (2025, May 28). Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>
- Magramo, K., McCluskey, M., & Hansler, J. (2024, May 5). “full-blown famine” happening in Gaza, WFP warns, amid fresh push for truce. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/05/middleeast/gaza-famine-world-food-programme-intl-hnk>
- Guardian News and Media. (2025, July 1). Twelve Days in Gaza: What happened while the world looked away?. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/01/gaza-israel-iran-war-idf>
- Hamdi Yıldız. (2021, January 11). The Palestine Group says news about the election is false. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/palestine-group-says-news-about-election-false/2112646>
- Humanitarian support in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. British Red Cross. (2025, July 22). <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/international/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territory>
- The IRC. Crisis in Gaza: What to know and how to help. (2025, June 26). <https://www.rescue.org/crisis-in-gaza>
- Quillen, S., Mohamed, E., Motamedi, M., Uras, U., & Magee, C. (2025, July 14). Updates: Hamas says “war of attrition” in Gaza as 3 Israeli soldiers killed. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2025/7/14/live-israel-pounds-gaza-as-criticism-grows-of-plans-for-camps-in-rafah>
- UNRWA situation report #166 on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem | unrwa. (2025, April 4). <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-166-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem>
- UNRWA situation report #179 on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem | unrwa. UNRWA11. (2025, July 11). <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-179-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem>
- United Nations. (2024, August 23). Global threats to freedom of expression arising from the conflict in Gaza - report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan (A/79/319) - question of Palestine. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-special-rapporteur-23aug24/>
- United Nations. (2025, July 11). Gaza: “unacceptable” choice between getting shot or getting fed | UN news. United Nations. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165368>
- World Health Organization. (2025, May 12). People in Gaza are starving, sick, and dying as the aid blockade continues. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-05-2025-people-in-gaza-starving--sick-and-dying-as-aid-blockade-continues>
- Schiavenza, M. (2025, June 18). UNHCR: Global forced displacement surges past 122 million. HIAS. <https://hias.org/news/unhcr-global-forced-displacement-surges-past-123-million/>

Reclaiming the Muslim Narrative: TikTok's Disruption of Islamophobia and the Urgency of Media Sovereignty

DR. MAI JIANJUN
AHAS KIRKHS



INTRODUCTION

In the age of digital globalisation, narrative control is power. For decades, Western media empires from CNN and BBC to digital monopolies like Google, Meta, and Twitter, or known as X, have weaponized information to institutionalize Islamophobia. Muslims have been reduced to caricatures, which are threats to be feared, problems to be solved, or voices to be silenced. This hegemony distorts realities, justifies wars, and erases Muslim humanity.

Yet a disruption emerged. TikTok, a non-Western platform, momentarily shattered this monopoly. During the Gaza genocide, its algorithm bypassed censors, forcing raw Palestinian testimonies into global consciousness. Hashtags like #GazaGenocide trended as TikTok exposed what corporate media suppressed: Muslim pain, resilience, and truth.

But this window proved fragile. Under Western pressure, TikTok throttled Gaza content, proving even alternative platforms cannot be trusted. This article argues that TikTok's brief triumph holds one urgent lesson like combating Islamophobia demands more than hashtag activism. Muslims must reclaim narrative sovereignty by building an independent media infrastructure and platforms owned by the *ummah*, governed by its ethics, and freed from geopolitical blackmail. Until we own our algorithms, servers, and stories, the Muslim voice remains a whisper in a storm of lies.

DEFINITION ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia is more than just prejudice against Muslims it is a systematic and institutionalized fear, hatred, or hostility towards Islam as a religion and Muslims as a people. It appears in discriminatory laws, hate speech, media bias, physical violence, and political policies that marginalize Muslim communities. Islamophobia is not only a social attitude but also a strategic political tool used by certain powers to dehumanize Muslims, justify wars, restrict civil liberties, and silence Muslim voices both domestically and internationally.

Scholars have pointed out that Islamophobia is sustained through narratives that portray Islam as inherently violent, misogynistic, or incompatible with modernity and liberal values. The risk of this framing lies in its cumulative impact on public perception, policy-making, and inter-community relations, particularly in multicultural societies. Central to upholding this narrative is the role of the media.

The Role of Western Media in Promoting Islamophobia

Western media, especially after the 9/11 attacks, has played a dominant role in associating Islam with violence and Muslims with extremism. From news coverage to movies, from television dramas to political commentary, Islam and Muslims are overwhelmingly portrayed through a negative lens. These portrayals rarely reflect the diversity, intellectual richness, and ethical foundations of the Muslim world.

What makes this dangerous is not only the misinformation itself but also the monopolistic nature of global media power. For decades, the Western world has maintained hegemonic control over information dissemination channels. News agencies like CNN, BBC, Fox News, Reuters, and others have shaped global perceptions of Islam, often with little or no input from Muslim voices. Even more concerning, this bias is systematised across social media monopolies. Google's search algorithms and YouTube policies systematically favour Israeli state narratives while shadow-banning Palestinian documentation. Facebook and Instagram, owned by Meta, routinely censor pro-Palestine content as "incitement," removing posts about Israeli airstrikes or Palestinian funerals under vague "community standards." During the Gaza crisis, Instagram restricted the hashtag #PalestinianLivesMatter, while Facebook's AI labelled images of wounded Palestinian children as violent content.

Similarly, Twitter or X amplified verified Israeli accounts spreading debunked claims that Hamas beheaded babies through algorithmic promotion, while suspending Palestinian journalists like Motaz Azaiza under "sensitive media" policies. Elon Musk's reinstatement of banned far-right accounts further normalised anti-Muslim hate speech, with posts calling for the annihilation and self-cleansing trending globally.

Together, these platforms form an architecture of digital suppression that Google buries truth, Meta erases evidence, and Twitter or X weaponises disinformation. Their neutrality is a myth that each is embedded in Western geopolitical interests, reducing Muslim suffering to algorithmic noise.

This informational imbalance denies Muslims the right to speak for themselves. Their experiences, grievances, histories, and aspirations are filtered through hostile or ignorant lenses. Yet new opportunities emerge with non-Western platforms.

TikTok and the Gaza War

The 2023–2024 Gaza War provided a striking example of TikTok's potential in challenging Western media narratives. As traditional media outlets and Western tech giants such as Google, Meta, and X either ignored or distorted the reality on the ground, TikTok became a major platform for firsthand documentation and reporting. Palestinian youth, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens used TikTok to upload real-time videos of destruction, displacement, and human tragedy inflicted by Israeli attacks. These videos, often raw, emotional, and brutally honest, bypassed traditional gatekeeping mechanisms and reached a global audience.

For the first time in recent history, millions around the world were exposed to the suffering of Palestinians not through the lens of Western social media or digital platforms, but through Palestinian eyes. TikTok became a platform where the humanity of Muslims, routinely erased in mainstream media, was powerfully affirmed. The hashtag #FreePalestine trended globally, igniting many young people in the West, including non-Muslims, who began questioning the official narratives presented by their governments and media outlets.

Western powers quickly recognized this threat. In response, attempts were made to restrict or ban TikTok, especially in the United States, citing “national security concerns.” In truth, it was about narrative control, such as a Western hegemony over global storytelling was being challenged by a platform it neither owned nor fully controlled.

Yet TikTok's resistance proved fragile. Under intense pressure from the U.S. and Israel, the platform will downgrade Gaza content by late 2023. Hashtags like #GazaGenocide were throttled, creators exposing war crimes saw their reach plummet, and sensitive content warnings censored evidence. This capitulation reveals a harsh truth that even non-Western platforms bow to geopolitical power. When TikTok silences Palestinians, it confirms Muslims cannot entrust their stories to any foreign-owned platform, including this one.

Lessons from TikTok: Reclaiming the Muslim Narrative

The case of TikTok teaches several important lessons for the Muslim world in its long battle against Islamophobia:

1. Media Power is Narrative Power

The ability to tell one's own story is fundamental to dignity, identity, and political agency. For too long, Muslims have been spoken *about* rather than *spoken to*, and their realities have been defined by others. TikTok shows that when alternative platforms are available, suppressed voices can rise and influence global consciousness. To effectively combat Islamophobia, Muslims must prioritize building and supporting their own global media infrastructure.

2. Authenticity Resonates

The virality of Gaza-related content on TikTok was due not only to its graphic content but to its authenticity. Real stories, told by real people, evoke empathy and action. Muslims do not need to invent counter-narratives; they need to tell the truth of their lives. Islam is not a problem to be explained, it is a civilization to be understood. The global public, especially younger generations, is hungry for unfiltered truths and morally grounded perspectives.

3. Youth Engagement is Crucial

TikTok is dominated by youth, and it is among youth that ideological battles are most intense. Muslim youth around the world are both the victims of Islamophobia and its potential remedy. Empowering them to speak, share, create, and represent their faith in the digital realm is essential. This requires investment in digital literacy, content creation, and platform development that targets young audiences.

4. Innovation Breaks Hegemony

TikTok disruption proves that technological innovation and creative strategy can dismantle Western media hegemony. Muslims must master cutting-edge algorithms, data sovereignty, and user-centric design to build world-class platforms. Confidence in our capacity for excellence, not mere imitation, is essential. When Muslim engineers, designers, and strategists lead, we can create tools that amplify truth globally.

5. Ownership is Non-Negotiable

TikTok's forced retreat on Gaza content proves that platforms we don't control will never prioritize our truth. Muslims must build their digital infrastructure, a Muslim TikTok free from Western or Eastern political pressure. This isn't about isolation, it's about digital sovereignty. We need algorithms designed by Muslim engineers, servers hosted in Muslim-majority nations, and policies written by Muslim jurists and ethicists protecting *our* narratives from deletion. If platforms like Google, Meta, and Twitter or X can erase our stories, and even TikTok bends to censorship, owning our infrastructure is existential. If 2 billion Muslims can't own a global platform, we concede the information war by default.

The Way Forward: Building a Global Muslim Media Infrastructure

The Muslim world, with its vast population, rich intellectual heritage, and shared spiritual values, has the potential to establish media platforms that not only serve Muslims but also contribute positively to global dialogue. Such platforms should be committed to truth, justice, diversity, and excellence. They must be multilingual, technologically advanced, and accessible to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Establishing independent, multilingual news agencies with global reach and rigorous journalistic standards

Encouraging and training Muslim youth to become skilled digital influencers, content creators, data scientists, platform engineers, and ethical storytellers.

Creating and developing globally influential digital platforms that host Islamic content, scholarly discussions, community narratives, and creative expression.

Initiatives could include:

Building strategic alliances with other marginalized communities and ethical technologists globally to challenge misinformation systems and share technological expertise.

Investing heavily in R&D and innovation hubs focused on cutting-edge media technology by developing world-class algorithms, secure decentralized infrastructure, AI tools for multilingual content and moderation, and user-centric design all guided by Islamic ethics.

Developing think tanks and research centers focused on digital media strategy, combating Islamophobia, and analyzing the evolving global information landscape.

These efforts should not be fragmented or reactionary. A coordinated, visionary, and long-term approach is necessary one that understands the media not just as a tool of defense, but as a platform for da'wah, education, cultural renewal, and technological leadership.

Conclusion

TikTok has provided a glimpse into a possible future where Muslims can tell their own stories and challenge Islamophobia not through protest alone, but through powerful storytelling, visual authenticity, technological innovation, and digital creativity. The lessons from TikTok are clear: media power must be reclaimed, and Muslims must invest in building their sovereign platforms of global influence, not as imitators, but as pioneers capable of world-class breakthroughs in technology and narrative strategy. Islamophobia is not inevitable. It is constructed, and therefore, it can be deconstructed. But this will only happen when Muslims realize that in the battle of narratives, silence is surrender, and technological dependence is complicity. TikTok broke the silence. The next step is to build a media infrastructure engineered by our minds, governed by our ethics, and amplified by our creativity, where the Muslim voice is no longer an exception, but a norm, a force, and a truth the world cannot ignore.

Report A Scholarly Discussion with Dr. Haitham al-Hadad on *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

Belayet Hossen

PHD CANDIDATE, AHAS KIRKHS



We have just finished a wonderful scholarly discussion with Sheikh Dr. Haitham Al-Hadad, Chair, Fatwa Committee, Islamic Council of Europe. Dr. Hadad's lecture focused on "The Higher Objectives of Islam: A Thematic Guide to *Maqāṣid*, Halal and Haram".

The Program was honoured and officiated by Professor Dr. Hafiz Zakariya, respected Dean, AHAS KIRKHS, IIUM, moderated by Associate Professor Dr. Abdulhamid Mohamed Ali Zaroum, where the MC of the program was Associate Professor Dr. Shaheed Abdullahi Busari and Associate Professor Dr. Sayyed Mohamed Muhsin, respected Head, Department of Fiqh and Usūl al-Fiqh, delivered the closing remark.

In the welcoming speech, Professor Dr. Hafiz Zakariya said that: "The issue of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* is crucial in the intellectual arena of this contemporary world. It is not only a burning issue among the scholars of the Islamic world, but it has also created an intellectual discourse among the scholars of the Western world. It has now become a global issue that discusses the philosophy of Islamic law. Our scholars should pay more attention to the exploration of the objectives of Islam and to integrate them with all branches of contemporary knowledge."

However, Sheikh Dr. Haitham Al-Hadad in his lecture said that: "Scholars of our Ummah should think that today, what we teach our students in the name of Islamic Studies and Shari'ah Studies at our schools, madrasahs and universities, is it conducive to rebuilding our Ummah? What is the role of scholars of Ummah today, where people of Palestine are starving due to a lack of food and basic needs in front of the entire Islamic world?"





He added that “We should not remain in the context of the fourth century or fifth century of Islam to solve the current crises and problems of our Ummah. Rather, we have to study the texts written by our classical scholars from the perspective of the current era. The understanding of context is significant to comprehending Islam and its practice. If we always remain stuck in the context of those classical scholars, we will never be able to solve the problems that our Ummah faces today.”



On top of that, Dr. Hadad further said that: “In this case, the IIUM has to come forward and take the challenge to resolve the crises that the Ummah is collectively facing everywhere around the world. It is crucial to know that the problems that we experience today, the scholars of the classical period did not experience. They practiced the *mutūn* of their period, but we have to practice the *mutūn* based on our current context.”



He posed some questions to the audience in terms of Islamic Studies students, as he asked: “Do we teach them management sciences? Do we teach them social sciences? Don’t they need this kind of knowledge? Do our *fuqaha* know Islamic banking and finance properly? Do they have enough knowledge on this vital issue? If they do not know, then how will they solve the problems of our Ummah?”



Additionally, Dr. Haitham mentioned that Islam is not the mere religion that we see today. Rather, it was one of the superpowers of that period. Islam built the greatest civilization on earth. Nevertheless, he opined that we should rethink the notion of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. The scholars of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, did they truly comprehend the entire concept? What are the objectives of Islam that Allah SWT expressed in His *Quran*? If we survey the *Quran*, we find numerous objectives of *Sharī'ah*, for instance: Worshiping Allah alone, establishing justice on earth, testing human beings (*ibtilā*), and making Islam victorious over all other religions of the world, etc. Did our scholars of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* mention these in their *Maqāṣidic* discourse? If the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* is confined only to five or more than this specific *kulliyyāt*, then where is the *Maqāṣid* of justice (*'adl*)? Where are the *Maqāṣid* of *makārim al-Akhlāq*, where the Prophet (saw) said that he was sent to perfect the morality of people? And where is the discourse of *Maqāṣid al-'Amān* and *Maqāṣid al-Ṭahārah*?

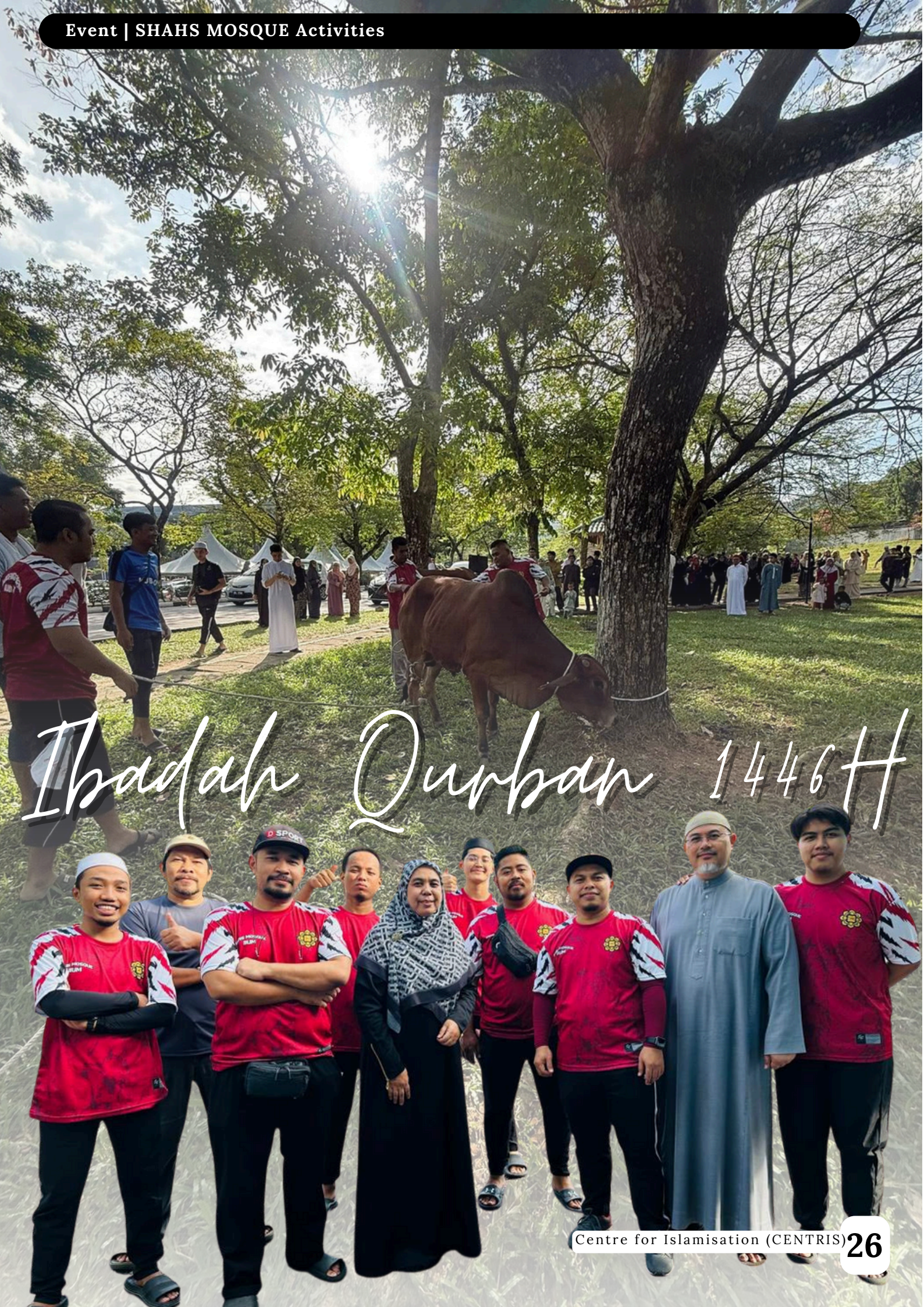
After his lecture, there was an interactive and engaging discussion among the participants. He answered the numerous questions coming from the participants, where faculty members, master's, and PhD students were included. The active participation of the audience in discussion with Dr. Haitham proves that the program was truly fruitful, mind-blowing, and full of enlightenment. Many more scholars like Dr. Haitham from across the world should be invited to IIUM so that teachers and students at the university can share their gained knowledge and experiences with them, and that is how they can produce new knowledge, which may benefit not only Islam and Muslims of Malaysia but also it may benefit the entire humankind.

The session was jointly organized by AHAS KIRKHS's Coordinator of the Islamization of Human Knowledge (IOHK) Office and *Nadwat al-Jumu'ah* Committee of the Department of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, held on July 25, 2025, from 9:30 am to 12 pm at al-Tabari Conference Room, Human Science Building, AHAS KIRKHS, IIUM.



Eid al-Adha Prayer





Ibadah Qurban 1446H



eISSN 2811-342X



9 772811 342006