THEME: Imam Khomeini (R.A) the real proclaimer of justice and peaceful coexistence.

Topic: Intolerance as an emerging threat to global peace and security: Lessons from some gleanings of Imam Khomeini (R.A)

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Introduction

Intolerance as a threat to global peace and security

Intolerance is one of the challenges facing humanity and it is currently on the increase. The upsurge of intolerance is a threat to democracy, peace and security. Intolerance is the cause of death, genocide, violence, religious persecution and other sorts of conflicts. Intolerance is caused by among others: religion, ethnicity, race and political ideologies etc. Intolerance stirs up hatred and justifies exclusion of those who are profiled as the “other”. Intolerance raises a fundamental question of the ability of people of different nationalities, religions, races, ethnicities and social economic and political backgrounds to live together in peace. Since we live in a world that is characterized by cultural, religious, ethnic and racial diversities, there is need to cultivate tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors.

The need for tolerance

However, tolerance is more than peaceful coexistence of people of different cultures, religions, races, ethnicities and nationalities. Tolerance is an active and positive attitude that inspires recognizing and respecting the rights and freedoms of other people regardless of their cultural, religious, ethnic, racial and national backgrounds. Tolerance implies that concern for others must prevail over heartlessness and hatred; striving to know and understand the “other” replaces ignorance, blind prejudice and discrimination. Through tolerance we can engage in dialogue, and other exchanges which will enable us to accept others, their values and differences. This is imperative for a safer and peaceful world that we all aspire to live in.

As we commemorate the 26th Anniversary of the demise of the founder of the Islamic Republic, we need to look back and reflect on his legacy and ask the question: “what lessons we can learn from the late Imam Khomeini (R.A) regarding promotion of justice and peaceful coexistence in the world?

Lessons of Tolerance from Imam Khomeini (R.A)

The following are some of the lessons on tolerance and peaceful coexistence that we can learn from some gleanings of the late Imam.
The messages and speeches of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the late Imam Khomeini (R.A) are replete with a call for unity of the three monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism, for which he was a great champion. He emphasized that all the divine (monotheistic) religions were revealed from the same sources and were similar in their basic essence and teachings. He argued that, the unity of three religions was not only imperative to fight colonialism but also to fight the enemies of Islam. He impressed on the followers of the three religions to unite against imperial and aggressive powers in order to confront the conspiracies of global arrogance and to tackle material, social and spiritual pressures and problems confronting humanity.¹ He strongly rejected and condemned sectarianism among Muslims and thus advocated the unity of all Muslims.

To establish justice in the world, the great Imam maintained that Christians and leaders of the Western world should follow the pure teachings of the Jesus Christ instead of showing partisanship and supporting the wrongs perpetrated by some aggressive and materialistic minded rulers.

Equally, the Imam was a strong believer in the plurality of religions and thus underscored the need to respect others’ religions. In this connection, he paid special attention to the issues of human dignity and religious tolerance. In an interview with Dutch Die Welt Grant newspaper in 1978, he reportedly said: “Any Iranian should enjoy civil rights and there is no difference between Muslim, Jew, Christian or follower of any other religion”.² It is in this regard that, he strongly denounced insults and negative media portray of the followers of other religions. During Christmas, he would send greetings and congratulatory messages to Christians all over the world. Examples of some of these messages read:

The almighty God’s greetings and salutations to the Holy Christ, son of Mary, the Spirit of God, and the honorable Prophet who resuscitated the dead and awakened the drowsy.³

² ibid
³ ibid
Greetings and salutations of the Great God to His dignified Mother, Virgin Mary and virtuous saintly woman, who through the divine breath, offered such a great son to those who were thirsty for divine mercy.4

Greetings to the clerics, priests and monks who through the teachings of Jesus Christ call the rebellious souls to peace.5

Throughout his leadership the late Imam was a staunch supporter of the freedom of religious minorities and issued special recommendations and advised that their rights be observed.6 He is reported saying:

Barely are all residents of a country of the same religion and race and barely do they speak the same language. A group of people with common culture, language, religion and origin make up the majority of any nation. Small groups with their diverse language, race and religion constitute the minority.7

Indeed, the international human rights and agencies such as the UN Dialogue on Faith and Religious traditions have been inspired by the views of Imam Khomeini (R.A) on peaceful coexistence and respect for the rights of the minorities.8

The Imam believed that man’s intuition is based on monotheism, charity, search for truth and justice. According to him, if general awareness increases and pride, arrogance, and self centeredness weaken, and human beings seek God, then they would live in peace and tranquility.9

In conclusion, Imam Khomeini (R.A) left a rich legacy as a defender and advocate of justice and peaceful coexistence. He will be remembered as a model par excellence for tolerance, spirituality and moral values for generations to come. His works and initiatives remain equally popular among Muslims, Christians, Jews and followers of other faiths.10

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4 ibid  
5 ibid  
7 https://www.The Herald, 2 June 2015  
8 ibid  
9 ibid  
10 ibid