

# Desecularize Islam Declaration

## I.

Muslims everywhere are haunted by the painful reality of our ummah. We have been witness to the slaughters, wars, and conflicts exacted against it for as long as we can remember. The genocides we are seeing on our social media feeds right now is just the most recent episode in a now long history of carnage against Muslims. Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Kashmir, East Turkestan, Bosnia, Chechnya, just to name a few in the past few decades. Every time feels the same: the hearts of the ummah come together, but nothing seems to get done. The cyclic tragedy of it numbs us over time, and a prevailing sense of helplessness takes hold in the minds of the Muslims over our state of affairs.

Beyond just the death and destruction, Muslim societies themselves aren't what we'd like them to be. The reputation our countries have is of corruption, injustice, and backwardness. Whereas Islam was once a role model civilization for the world, it is now Muslims that are leaving their countries to seek a better life in the West.

There is something deeply wrong about the current state of our ummah, and every Muslim -- even our kids -- can perceive it. It feels, as the prophet ﷺ described, that the world is coming around to feast on us like people inviting each other to share a plate of dinner, and that this is in spite of our large numbers.

But therein lies the paradox. The contradiction that we must address head on. That despite our strength, we as a Muslim nation are seemingly incapable of even securing our brothers and sisters from genocide, let alone having a role model civilization. We are almost 2 billion. Our population is one of the youngest. Our lands are some of the most resource-rich. Individual Muslims excel in every domain of life – business, medicine, academia. On every possible material metric, the ummah should be one of the strongest nations in the world.

This paradox is enough to drive some to a faith crisis, and others to a sense of helplessness. But its answer is straightforward: the ummah is not a powerful nation, because it is not a nation at all. Despite us having 2 billion Muslims, Islam itself ceased to be a basis for our togetherness. Its vision ceased to be the shared vision which binds us together politically. Instead, Islam became reduced in the minds of Muslims to a personal religion. A set of rituals, metaphysical beliefs, and everyday morals.

In other words, the root cause is one: Islam was secularized.

## II.

The heart of the Ummah is alive. We see it in the tears shed for Palestine and the genuine desire to help. When the genocide began, we saw hundreds of thousands on the streets, Muslims everywhere boycotting Zionist brands, qunoot performed in masajid across the ummah. However, we were not able to channel our energies in the right direction. We are running in circles because we are reacting to symptoms rather than treating the disease.

There are a few common responses to the situation of the ummah, which are either insufficient or counterproductive.

### 1) Reactionary Activism.

Many of our ummah who truly care have channeled their energy into protests, boycotts, and appeals to international law. These efforts are noble and necessary in the short term. But fundamentally, they fail to address the root cause of why our ummah became easy prey to begin with. Instead of taking ownership, we place our hopes in appeals to the very powers that oppress us. It's short-term thinking: our preoccupation with the immediate crisis tragically prevents us from addressing the long-term solution.

### 2) Nationalism

The flags and borders that we know trace back to Sykes-Picot and the post-WW1 division of the Muslim lands. For more than 100 years, colonialism has imposed and encouraged nationalistic identification. "Leave it, for it is rotten". This is what our prophet SAW said about tribalism, and any in-group identification that separates ourselves from being one ummah. The tragic reality of nationalism is that it is self-defeating. What is best for any one of our nations is what's best for the collective ummah. When we are divided, none of us have the strength to uphold our own rights, let alone that of our fellow Muslim. Until now, the main engine of Palestine activism has been the advocacy for an independent Palestinian state, instead of understanding that it is this splitting of the ummah into separate nation-states that made Palestine vulnerable to begin with.

### 3) Fatalistic Defeatism

Others, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the chaos, retreat inward. They view Islam primarily as a personal set of rituals and morals. They believe that if we simply improve our individual worship, families, and at best our local communities, then the political reality of the ummah will somehow shift on its own. This is wishful thinking that ignores the Prophet's (ﷺ) example of building a society, a market, and a state.

This approach also carries a neglect of the cause-and-effect that Allah created in the world. We pray for a mahdi figure to save us, when the Prophet ﷺ famously told us to tie our camel and trust in Allah. While we apply this attitude to our careers and studies, we don't apply it to our duty to revive the ummah.

The insufficiency of these responses, and the problem in the ummah that they are a reaction to, both have the same root cause. Our understanding of Islam – the fundamental truth of life – was secularized.

### III.

What does it mean to say Islam was "secularized"?

Secularism is the idea that the law should be set by men, not God. It tolerates (and even supports) personal belief in a creator, ritual worship, and the existence of religious communities. But it draws a line at how society should be organized. Law, in secular society, is for men to decide. There is no room for appeals to the divine. "Render unto Caesar what is to Caesar, and render unto God what is to God". This separation between "church" and "state" was the basis for the European "enlightenment", and it came to define the role of "religion" within society.

Islam, on the other hand, is the antithesis of this separation. At the heart of Islam is an idea so beautiful in its simplicity; that God, the creator, is the only entity with the right and ability to legislate for His creation with justice. Men are biased; when they presume the right to legislate, they cause injustice. The entire history of humanity is one of subjugation: by the ones who hold the authority to legislate, against the rest who don't. Instead of being a tool for justice, the law becomes a weapon wielded to serve one group's interests over another. It is this obvious truth -- that the unbiased, all-knowing creator of Men should be their sole legislator -- that the prophets were sent to enact [2:213, 57:25, 42:13]. In the words of the companion Rab'ee ibn 'Amir to the Persian general Rustum, "[Islam] was sent to liberate humanity from subjugation to the creation, to subjugation to the Creator". The shahadah itself is a statement that rejects the sovereignty of all except the Creator. The Qur'an explicitly establishes that legislation is the exclusive right of Allah [12:40, 4:65].

And yet, few Muslims today understand their deen this way. Even educated Muslims have unwittingly accepted the status of Islam as a "religion", in the same secular role that Christianity occupies today. Our notion of 'ibadah became ritual "worship", rather than comprehensive submission to God as the only sovereign. Our notion of shirk has been restricted to those who associate creators besides Allah, rather than those who associate sovereigns besides Him. We think being a Muslim is just about personally abiding by God's commandments, and we forget that the prophetic mission was to establish it.

This is what we mean when we say that Islam was secularized. Instead of the comprehensive system it was revealed as, it became something it was not: a mere "religion".

This did not happen naturally. It was the result of an intentional campaign by western colonizers and their collaborators to change what Islam means to the ummah. The seeds can be found in Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1799, which included a crackdown on the scholars and students of knowledge of al-Azhar. The weakened state was then ruled by Mohammad Ali Pasha, a modernist who believed that western secular values were the path forward to progress. He sent imams like Rifa'at at-Tahtawi to Paris to absorb the "Enlightenment" and bring it back to the Muslim world. Muhammad Abduh, a modernist and freemason, became the grand mufti of al-Azhar. The pattern of a west-supported subverted elite repeated itself in Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Jamal al-din al-Afghani, Mustafa Kemal, and more.

The intellectual invasion, coupled with a military one that broke the ummah's political unity in the First World War, resulted in an understanding of Islam that was thoroughly secularized in the minds of the Muslims. The two billion Muslims of the world no longer see themselves as one nation. It is when Islam stopped being the politics that we adopted disparate political ideologies and national identities. It is no wonder that the unity of the ummah has been so elusive; Islam as a mere religion has no more unifying power than Christianity or Buddhism. And it has remained so; until now, the mainstream understanding of Islam is of this secularized form

#### **IV.**

The solution can only then be: we must reclaim the comprehensive understanding of our deen as a system. We must desecularize Islam.

To desecularize Islam means to reverse the spiritualistic compartmentalization that happened to it over the past two centuries. Islam is supposed to be the glue that unites this ummah. Islam is supposed to be a just legal code for our societies. Islam is supposed to be a role model civilization for all of humanity. When Islam was secularized, it stopped being those things.

When we desecularize Islam, it becomes the shared vision of two billion people. No longer divided by ethnicity, language barriers, or competing interests, Islam empowers Muslims to become one nation true to the word "ummah". It is when we collectively accept that being a Muslim means total submission to God's sovereignty that we restore our dignity. It is as Umar ibn al-Khattab said: God gave us honor through Islam, and trying to find it anywhere else will only lead to our humiliation.

**This is the mission of "Desecularize Islam".** We are here to desecularize Muslim minds everywhere, because we know that this is the first step towards the revival of

the ummah. That is our north star: to make the true understanding of Islam as a system the new mainstream. We do this by:

- 1) **Creating awareness** about the true reality of Islam and how it was secularized. The message of Islam online is largely secularized, emphasizing ritual worship if not totally negating politics. We must reverse the tide by establishing a principled voice for Islam that is louder. Podcasts, videos, writings, through the official Desecularize Islam channels and individuals who share our mission.
- 2) **Providing desecularized alternatives** to the secularized way we conduct ourselves as a Muslim community. Khutbahs, street da'wah, Islamic school curricula, MSAs, masaajid, activism. When we are not deliberate, these good works fall prey to the limitations of secularized Islam and reinforce it. In order to make our efforts worthwhile, we must empower Muslims in all sectors of life to do the good work they are doing with a desecularization mission.
- 3) **Enabling motivated, talented “desecularizers”**. The ummah is not short on those who want to serve it. Young and motivated Muslims who want to help are everywhere. They just don't have an outlet that is convincing, Islamic, and able to utilize their various skillsets. We are here to enable them with toolkits on our website for spreading the desecularization message, mentorship, and a network of like-minded individuals who are trying to make this change happen. We have a form on our website for these motivated individuals to get in touch with us and join our support network.

We, the authors of this document, are just the seed. This is not our movement; it is the movement of every sincere Muslim who cares about the ummah, wants to help it, and realizes that the way to do so is by desecularizing Islam. If that describes you, then you belong to this movement.

Visit the rest of our website, check out our toolkits, watch our podcast, and share this with your friends, family, and community.