

研究ノート

From Humanitarian to Development Assistance Agency: Case Study of a Transnational Muslim Civil Society Organization, IHH in Palestine

Iyas Salim

Introduction

In recent years, the Islamic civil society has risen to global prominence as an active actor in the areas of humanitarianism and development. For NGOs from Muslim societies that have barely been known internationally only ten years ago, a considerable number of Muslim NGOs, currently demonstrate a tremendous presence in the global arena of aid and development. Not only have they proven the ability to generate resources in their own local community and provide aid and social services for local societies, they have also transferred humanitarianism and development programs across national borders. The world is witnessing a new trend of Muslim societies mobilizing local resources for self-funding and hence self-empowerment towards meeting humanitarian emergencies and provision of social services in the pursuit of ownership of development and social justice. The trend is gaining momentum across the Islamic world where Islamic religious and spiritual values influence societies across all societal segments in motivating individuals and communities to bear a wide responsibility at home and abroad. The momentum is translated as NGOs empowered by local communities' donations reach out to Muslim and Non-Muslim communities beyond national borders. In increasingly turbulent global conditions of man-made calamities and natural disasters, Muslim NGOs are witnessing a role which is steadily increasing as a global provider of humanitarian aid and development.

In Gaza, Palestine, humanitarian conditions reached a crisis level as the Israeli-imposed siege of Gaza worsened in the years following 2006. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip held a national election in 2006 in which the Islamic movement Hamas won a majority-seat in the Palestinian Legislation Council. Israel imposed a siege on the Gaza strip and the U.S.

lead an international campaign of boycotting the newly elected government. Subsequently, the Humanitarian situation deteriorated at all levels. Development projects came to a complete halt where donor countries withdraw their activates programs. Hence, the health sector suffered the most from shortages of medical supplies, lack of equipment or absence of maintaining existing ones. The alarming poverty rate meant vulnerable children facing malnutrition and poor health. Desperate calls by international human rights organizations and United Nations offices such as UNRWA, United Nations Relief and Work Agency, warned of pending humanitarian disasters in Gaza. On top of that, the war on Gaza at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 plunged Gaza further into a humanitarian crisis. Siege remained imposed and the entire population of Gaza was isolated from the outside world. The official donor community followed political policies with no impact on changing reality on the ground...

In May 2010, the Turkish-based NGO, IHH, The Foundation for Human Rights, Freedom and Humanitarian Relief, organized a Flotilla of humanitarian boats with the participation of numerous global civil organizations and a number of European and international parliament members. Nationalities of participants in the Freedom Flotilla included Greece, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Australia, Germany, France, America, Sweden, Turkey, South Africa, Egypt and many others.¹ The Flotilla sailed from Istanbul at the end of May, 2012 heading towards the port of Gaza for the aim of delivering humanitarian needs to the people of Gaza, bringing freedom and end to the seige. The incident took a sudden turn when the Israeli military attacked the Flotilla in international waters killing nine Turkish citizens. The incident became instant international news. The global civil society and human rights organizations rallied behind the Freedom Flotilla and condemned the military attack. Political and public repercussions followed in immediately regionally and internationally. The government of Turkey took a firm stand against Israel and severed bilateral relations to an all-time low level. The Egyptian government under the deposed former dictator of Egypt, Mubarak, was compelled to open the Rafah crossing, between Egypt and the Gaza-Strip, to ease the border closure. Humanitarian conveys from Muslim countries and Europe began to arrive, exerting pressure on pre-revolution Egyptian government to allow them into Gaza to deliver humanitarian

assistance.

This paper will demonstrate how Muslim NGOs respond to humanitarian and development needs across national borders by mobilizing local communities through campaigns of awareness and funding. A crucial aspect is realized with funding by local community, empowered by networking and volunteers. Moreover, it is equally crucial to understand how civil society organizations extend humanitarian and development services and programs beyond national borders. Field surveys in Turkey and Palestine were conducted in October and November of 2011 as well as September 2012 aiming at exploring the civil society in Turkey and how humanitarian and development activities transformed beyond national borders, in this case, to Gaza, Palestine. The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) is the case study. In the absence of an official donor community in Gaza, civil society organizations from the Muslim World appear to fill in the void left behind by donor governments in undertaking the goals of humanitarian and development. The Muslim civil society is posed to emerge as a new form of empowerment, enhanced by people-to-people approach for the pursuit of ownership of development.

1. The Debate on Muslim Civil Society

1.1 Muslim Civil Society in General

The study of Muslim Civil Society organizations has attracted much attention by different scholars in the last couple of decades. As more Muslim NGOs are expanding their role in the realm of humanitarian and development assistance, different scholars have touched upon the phenomenon. One school of thought, as Pipes pointed out, is that Muslim NGOs use humanitarian and development assistance to mask political or militant agenda.² Such a view found some resonance in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the increasing track record of Muslim NGOs throughout the world in response to wars and disasters has outpaced inherent distrust of them, even though anti-Islamic bias remains in some corners.

One major view argues that all “humanitarians are political” in which NGOs are influenced by their states.³ Humanitarian NGOs are out to compete for the annual global budget of three billion dollars.⁴ Emphasizing

the political aspect, Benthall, an anthropologist and a contemporary scholar on transnational Muslim NGOs, attempts to stress the political dimension of charitable organizations by describing it as being part of the politics of global humanitarianism.⁵ In all, the possibility of politicizing the work of humanitarian NGOs remains a reality.

However, an all-encompassing judgment would not be fair to the activities of many NGOs and the local communities supported by them. It is more of a norm for Western-based NGOs to receive substantial funding from perspective governments while Islamic NGOs are generally more often funded by the local community. These donations are part of the Islamic tradition of Zakat and Sadaqa. Yet, a political overall objective would not be ruled out: there exists a parameter of discrepancy in attaching political outlooks. It would be an exaggeration to equate Western NGOs with Muslim ones on the basis of some imagined “parity” in terms of politicizing humanitarian aid. The Benthall view that all humanitarian is politicized as explained earlier resonates a truth in linking aid and politics; even in area of NGOs. However, a more careful examination is necessary to scrutinize religious oriented NGOs more objectively.

Esposito, the well-known scholar on Islam, goes further by looking at Islamic organizations from a micro level. Esposito argues that Islamic ideologies provide a sense of meaning and purpose in which Muslims can identify with in a genuine spirit of solidarity.⁶ Muslim civil associations and movements have been able to respond to the needs of people with success.⁷ Further elaborating the role of Islamic faith, Yavuz stresses that value of voluntarism and sacrifice and serving the public interest are all part of the Muslim faith and tradition.⁸ The contemporary growth of Muslim voluntary organizations offers the prospect for Muslim solidarity through concrete activities. This also in turn ensures that religion remains relevant by “institutional modernization towards participatory politics,” as put by Mitsue and Sidiqi.⁹ In this regard, Muslim NGOs have embarked on the challenge to “galvanising their moral authority”¹⁰ to implement governance and public accountability.¹¹ Accordingly, this emboldens the prospect that Muslim humanitarian and development can be agents of transformation.”¹²

Prominent Muslim scholars such as Qaradawi, Al Awa, Turabi and Ghanouchi¹³, emphasize the high Islamic value of charity found in Muslim

NGOs: civil work of humanitarian and development organizations.¹⁴ Renowned scholar of the Muslim world, Qaradawi, argues that the worshiping of God leads to cementing the ties of brotherhood among people.¹⁵ Social solidarity extends to moral, material economic, civil, social and cultural fields of society.¹⁶ He argues further that Islam considers the economy the servant of Islamic values.¹⁷ The Islamic Scholar Turabi from Sudan argues that the “Quran envisions Islamic society as an active society.”¹⁸ Turabi’s point is that an active society means an active civil society with its various civil organizations in delivering services, programs and projects. Civil society organizations, claims Mohammad Salim Al Awa from Egypt, are means from freeing the society from the hold of the state. In other words, civil organizations can take on the responsibility to deliver services to people who need them most with being held hostage by government.¹⁹

As seen from different studies and opinions above, the subject of Muslim Civil Society has been discussed widely, however, not enough research has dealt with the area where Muslim Civil Society functions as an agency for humanitarian and development purposes across national borders. It is important to study how societies, particularly in the Muslim World, employ religious and spiritual values into grass-root funding and in turn transform it to humanitarian and development purposes across national borders. The case study of IHH offers an interesting perspective where the Turkish civic organization implements both humanitarian and development programs simultaneously in Palestine.

Moreover, there is a steadily emerging trend that humanitarian aid can no longer be considered sufficient as a type of temporary response to reduce suffering. Humanitarian aid needs to be extended to the realm of development.²⁰ The tendency among the aid community is to include both humanitarian and development in undertaking responsibility.²¹ From the field research on the activities of IHH in the Gaza Strip, the range of programs conducted and implemented there show that activities and plans include both the humanitarian and development factors. However, official international aid communities that extends development, in general, depends on the official frame of state.²² Public resources employed by international community legally need a state to deal with in order to spend public money.²³ In the case of Palestinian Occupied Territories, conflict is inevitably

perpetual in nature as Palestinian people struggle for independence and statehood. Civil organizations possess the flexibility necessary in situations where governments of aid communities would find it politically and legally hindering in pursuing development goals. That carries important implications for Muslim societies where they can play a pivotal role in solving problems through relief and development goals.

1.2 Turkish Civil Society since the 1990s

A brief background of the Turkish civil society in the 1990s is necessary to understand the social and political circumstances under which a Turkish religious NGO IHH was established. In 1992, the growing role of civil society organizations in political life was a relatively new phenomenon in Turkey.²⁴ The Turkish state showed a tendency to confront and quash what it saw as challenges to its authority in its traditional domains of power.²⁵ On the popular level, the people of Turkey have not rejected traditional and religious values for the sake of achieving modernity. On the contrary, the Turkish society adopted spiritual and religious values and saw no contradictions with democracy or the pursuit of modern life.²⁶ Thus, Islam has played a pivotal role between state or authoritarianism and the rest of society that aspires for social justice in Turkey.²⁷

With the recent Islamic awakening ushering a new Muslim-oriented Anatolian bourgeoisie in Turkey, there has come a new drive towards social activism. New social movements have steadily risen to mobilize the populace using Islamic concept and institutions.²⁸ Such ascendancy has changed the dynamics of relations between the society and state, creating a vigorous Islamic identity thriving towards social services and improvement of the lives of those marginalized and forgotten.²⁹ The Kemalist state apparatus could not stop or destroy such a latent drive, emerging from the “bottom”, towards socio-political change in addition to the re-affirmation of the Islamic identity of the people of Turkey.³⁰ At the end of the day, the state and the new Islamist actors began finding ways of facilitating institutional reforms in attempting to find space for accommodating each other.³¹

As the era of 1990s became invigorated by Islamist activists and civil society organizations, the National Outlook Movement emerged and was comprised of various organizations from the civil society and political parties

such as Milli Selamet (National Salvation), Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) and Fazilet Partisi (Virtue parties), Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party), unions, networks, groups and syndicates.³² The movement sought to find a moral alternative based on Islam for the quest to resist the totalitarian and “homogenising policies of the Kemalist state.”³³ But the state brought the emerging trend to a halt with a military coup in February, 1997.³⁴ Nevertheless, the Islamic-based movement became a source of power for the powerless and means to achieve social justice and political influence over society.³⁵ For such a movement, Muslim values have played a pivotal role in shaping their social and political strategies and moral outlook.

In the years following the coup of 1997, the Turkish civil society and Islamic movements increased and widened their participation in public life. The Turkish state realized that the military have weakened Turkish democracy by regular intervention and supervision.³⁶ The flourishing of society participation created the necessary prelude to the emergence of the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP, (The Justice and Development Party). With the eventual winning of the election of 2002, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, aware of grass-root movement in his country and its force in society, encouraged larger participation by the society and civil organizations. That indeed triggered a flourishing and dynamic civic society movement. Civil organizations such as IHH and Kimsu Yok Mu were transformed within several years into global actors of Humanitarian Relief and Development.

1.3 A Brief History of IHH

When the Bosnian war broke out in 1992, it marked a turning point for the Turkish society and the subsequent civic activism within the Turkish society.³⁷ Watching the Bosnian people going through the tragedy, agonies and pains of war, the Turkish people poured their sympathy and supported the Bosnians with whatever they could to help. The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) did not exist at the time. A group of young people, aged between twenty to thirty years old, decided to send relief support to Bosnia. The volunteers saw how the Bosnian people were suffering from injustice. It was at this particular time when the young people thought of establishing, unofficially, an organization and called it, The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief (IHH).³⁸

The Turkish Civil organization, IHH, describes itself as a humanitarian NGO driven by Muslim values.

The young group went to Bosnia at that time and provided support and relief. They delivered what Turkish people gave them to convey to the Bosnian people in time of need and war. IHH adopted a grass-root approach throughout the Turkish society in its funding activities empowered by local network of volunteers and sympathisers. During their stay in Bosnia, they had the chance to meet with, then, the Bosnian president, Mr. Ali Babizec. The Bosnian president had an advice for the young volunteers. He told them to return back to Turkey to start working on a much larger scale. He advised them that it was the responsibility of the Turkish people to unify the Muslim Umma (community) and help support many Muslims suffering from wars and poverty.³⁹

They returned back to Turkey and realized that many parts of the Muslim World were suffering from wars such as in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Africa, and Palestine and so on. They established IHH officially in 1995, “The Foundation of Human Rights, Freedom and Humanitarian Relief”. It was first established in Germany because Turkish laws at the time did not allow sending relief and aid outside of Turkey. The head office was established in Germany with a branch office in Istanbul. After Turkish laws changed and allowed relief and aid to be sent outside, IHH closed its office in Germany and established instead the head Quarters in Istanbul. By Ramadan of 2012, IHH activities reached to more than 130 countries and regions around the world.⁴⁰

2. The Emergence and Development of IHH

2.1 Motivation of Members and Volunteers

Many interviews were conducted with IHH staff and volunteers seeking answers on what motivates employees of IHH in working hard and exerting time and energy for many causes across the globe. Employees do share a strong sense of commitment to the humanitarian goals that IHH implements. Certainly Islamic values and spiritual motivation play a decisive role in the motivation of the organization. IHH defines itself as a humane NGO attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to the needy and protect human rights in seeking social justice and freedom. At the same time, members would stress

the fact that Islamic values carry strong sense of moral and spiritual bearings on their work. Everyone who was interviewed expresses the sentiment that his/her work is not only about being paid or for the job, but rather, the seeking of the spiritual and the temporal.⁴¹ The motivation, connected to the hereafter life, reward in life after death, is a powerful incentive and possesses a profound influence. As the Quran clearly indicates, “Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love. And whatever you spend - indeed, Allah is knowing of it.”⁴²

A young woman, educated abroad and well-travelled, has working for the Research and Publication Department of IHH for the past five years. She described her job at IHH as the following, “when I work here and in the process of helping people, I feel, actually, I am helping myself.”⁴³ She said that she did not like money; and as she put it, “I am running after people’s happiness.”⁴⁴ She stressed that there was a spiritual side that influences her commitment to work which is “thawab (reward).” The concept and value of Thawab reward in this life and afterlife is something that Muslims normally seek and thrive for. God gives “Thawab,” for every action a person participates in or commits to no matter how trivial this action is. The Quranic injunction says, “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.”⁴⁵ During her work, the IHH staff member does travel abroad on assignments. She often travels to other countries to deliver assistance and aid particularly during the times of Ramadan and Eid Al Adha. On such occasions, she makes it a point of visiting local NGOs for the purpose of networking and comparing notes, as she elaborated.

In an interesting study of the link between religion and helping others, the scholar Einolf concluded that religion and spirituality were most important motivational factors among the pro-social respondents.⁴⁶

One staff who is responsible for recruiting volunteers from universities, talked about how it all began at IHH. She said that she worked for a private company in the past. She intended to change her job few years back when she decided to wear the Hijab. She faced pressure from her company and eventually decided to quite the job. Working for IHH, according to her, makes her feel there is a goal in life and that her work connects the idea of this life and the afterlife. “Financial gain alone is not enough,” she confirmed.⁴⁷ In Islam, the notion of “Tkhalf,” bestowing of Allah, empower the motivation of

believers to carry out good actions and deeds. Ikhlaḥ in Islam combines the “two goods”, the good of this life and the good of the afterlife.⁴⁸ It is when a person gives charity or participates in charity work, such a person would feel the “blessings” filling his/her life; be it family or money, health, serenity, inner peace, harmony, uprightness. It is about seeking to live a meaningful and good life.⁴⁹ The Quran points out, “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer -We will surely cause him to live a good life, and we will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.”⁵⁰

Another staff member talked about her motivation in working for IHH, saying that there are many humanitarian problems in the world and she wants to do something about it. This (IHH) is the place that wants to do something about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and also to create public awareness inside Turkey and internationally. For example, the Mavi Marmara (Gaza Freedom Flotilla) tragedy contributed immensely to people’s awareness everywhere. With a canny political suave despite her young age, the female employee, explained that government can not do everything and that diplomacy alone can not solve problems either. “I feel I am part of the solution”, she said, adding that she, “trusts NGO work rather than government.” “I think NGOs will be the most important players in the twenty first century and that NGOs change public opinion and public opinion in turn change government policy”, she asserted.⁵¹

Another explained that Turkey has changed much in the past ten years. The public is more aware of important issues. He referred to the current Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, as one of the most influential figures in contemporary Turkey. Mr. Davutoğlu frequently delivered lectures and conducted seminars in the past on Islamic civil society, women NGOs and on his approach to Foreign policies. Asked about values which are important to him? He said that Islamic values play important motivation and that Islamic values make people believe in Justice and equality for everyone. Such motivation plays a powerful role in the daily life of Muslims. Prophet Mohammad once said, “There is a “Sadaqa”, charity or donation, to be given for every joint of the human body; and for every day on which the sun rises; there is a reward of a “Sadaqa” (i.e. charitable gift) for the one who establishes justice among people.”⁵² The staff member also draws from history

the institution of Waqf as a heritage since Ottoman times and how deeply engrained in Turkish society for its role in realizing social justice in the past. He explained that IHH was an institutionalized form of a traditional charity in Turkey.⁵³

A female employee talked about her part in volunteering for IHH when she was only seven years old when the Bosnian war took place. Now, she has been working for IHH for several years. She did not want to work for the government because it would prevent her from wearing the Hijab in addition to the belief that NGO work can help people more. Other staff members expressed similar sentiment on the desire to help others in distress. “Here we are not only working but helping others”, they said.⁵⁴ The concept of helping others is deeply influenced by the Tawhid, Unity of God, which is the essence of Islam. Tawhid is translated into solidarity and transnational activities and assistance across Muslim societies. As one Muslim scholar elaborates, “faith in the unity of God and the unity of His creation helps to unify Islamic societies despite their great social, cultural and economic diversity.”⁵⁵ The worshiping of God leads to cementing the ties of brotherhood among people and that is the goal of Islam in economy, explains the great Muslim scholar Qaradawi.⁵⁶ People don’t become immersed into winning bread of the day alone but it is about a larger meaning of life. An IHH employee said that NGOs have the ability to move fast, even faster than governments sometimes, and they can respond to different crisis in the world.⁵⁷

2.2 Characteristics and Methodology of IHH’s Activities

IHH exerts much effort in expanding the network of volunteers inside Turkish society. The volunteers assist IHH in its two vital objectives; awareness and fund raising. According to the External Affairs Officer at IHH, awareness and funding are two concepts that always proceed parallel. There are more than sixty thousand registered volunteers throughout Turkey who cooperate with IHH. Volunteers could come from different walks of life such as merchants, university students, professionals and so on. Normally, the volunteers in cities and localities form associations where a local businessman or a teacher becomes the head the organization. Currently, there are about twenty five cities throughout Turkey that have such local associations. At the outset of the Somali famine news in summer of 2011, IHH mobilized

those associations to collect donations and support to help the Somali people overcome the desperate situation resulting from the famine. The city of Bursa alone donated one Million USD. The same goes to other causes when IHH asks those local associations to start a campaign for orphans in Gaza for example.

Volunteerism

In Ankara, the capital of Turkey, IHH has an affiliated association working in the city of Ankara. The Ankara office enjoys a large number of volunteers working in the city. Presently, there are more than one thousand volunteers and it is increasing. The volunteers range consists of professionals, traders, businesspeople, students, etc. The volunteers express a willingness to participate in projects of IHH as they read and hear about various projects being implemented in many parts of the world. That is why IHH relies much on the support of local communities. Ankara office helps in the promotion of awareness campaigns with the participation of local volunteers in holding public symposiums and lectures, invite prominent figures, awareness campaign and so on. The promotion campaign normally consists of distributing books, procures, leaflets. That is followed by seeking funding from society members.

The Palestine issue enjoys a wide support in the Turkish public consciousness. After the tragedy of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, the sympathy for IHH activities ran very high among Turkish people. Turkish media covered the event of Gaza Flotilla and Mavi Marmara ship extensively over many days in the summer of 2010. Headlines like, “Israel Destroys and IHH builds,” flashed out in major newspapers at the aftermath of the Gaza Flotilla incident. IHH officials expressed their confidence in the Turkish people and the potential support for Palestinian people needs. If construction material is allowed into Gaza, one IHH staff said, IHH and Turkish society would be ready to begin the reconstruction of Gaza.

In a visit to a business area in central Istanbul, a number of local community members expressed the willingness to support humanitarian initiatives and projects conducted outside Turkey. Some talked about IHH as an organization that had been well known to their community since the Bosnian war twenty years ago. A local business man talked about how IHH was entrusted and capable of delivering donated money to the right people

and areas in distress. Another businessman described the people working for IHH and said he was encouraged by their wholeheartedness and dedication in the cause of humanitarian and relief work. IHH provides regular reports and feedback to the local community from the destination of delivery of relief such as the latest from Pakistani flooding of summer 2011. IHH was able to send back detailed reports that seem to count much in terms of trust and reliability for the local community. In many occasions, IHH takes private donors to the targeted areas of humanitarian and development activities in different parts of the world. For example, during latest month of Ramadan of 2012, a group of seven volunteers, mostly businesspeople, visited Gaza to deliver Ramadan Zakat. The purpose is observations and experience from firsthand of the humanitarian and development activities they have been supporting in the form charity and Zakat. In addition, it is considered a unique opportunity, given the special spirituality that the holy month of Ramadan evokes, to assess future charity projects and cooperation.

One local owner of a small business said that he donates with Zakat money and Sadaqa on a regular base according to religious practices. He explains that God bestows upon people His bounty and goodness and that money is like a trust and it should reach the right places of those who need it. Money is a responsibility, he added. The businessman elaborated that IHH is a good chance to help him in giving his Zakat and in turn his money is blessed. He said that he knew IHH for a long time and described those who work at IHH as honest, committed and trusted people.

Another group of local business people described how Turkish society is quite receptive to those who are in distress and in desperate need for relief and help. They said there are many traders and business people who are always willing to pay their Zakat and Sadaqa. They added that their help would not only go to Gaza but also it would reach Jewish people if they happen to live under siege and need help.

One businessman said that he noticed a wide participation by all spectrum of Turkish society for Palestine. He said that Turkish society with various political parties agrees in helping and supporting Palestine and that is the public sentiment in Turkey. And that is why IHH receives large support from a wide range of varying segments of society.

As civil society activists put it, there is no guarantee for NGO income but

Turkish people have the feelings of sympathy, mercy and love. When people here saw the tragedy of floods in Pakistan, they tried to help. In the past two months (summer of 2011), when people saw the famine and hunger in Somalia, Turkish people were moved by the scenes and tried to give whatever they could to the people in Somalia. As long as there is Zakat and Sadaqa, people continue their support for charity or civil society causes. It certainly helps when official recognition is awarded to IHH. Government official recognition of activities of an NGO boosts its standing in public. The Turkish Ministry of Waqf awarded IHH the prize of distinguished projects in 2005. IHH received another award in 2006 from the Turkish Parliament and was designated with the best project prize for a mobile hospital project in Kirkuk, Iraq in addition for the project of “Sewing Training for Women” in Somalia.⁵⁸

The lack of knowledge on how Muslims feel about the world is also a lack of knowledge on Islam’s stand and position in our world affairs at present time. The fact that members of a community watches a calamity somewhere outside own national borders and donate funds to alleviate the suffering tells much on how Muslims see the world. Compassion and empathy are two compelling factors. The fact that funding is carried out in parallel when natural disasters occur or when wars erupt is a more or less of a response by Muslims reacting in alleviating suffering and easing of pain. It is a value that Islam advocates and instils the sense of responsibility on individuals as being responsible in own community, the larger Umma of Islam and humanity at large. That this universe belongs to an all- encompassing creator that makes every individual connected to a centrally unified concept. The concept of Tawhid, Unity of God, invites people to relate to one another and therefore urges us to give and do the utmost when others fall into trouble and disasters. The Urgency of such responsibility can be a powerful and continuous reminder of what is it that a person should and must do for a fellow human being.

Taking shared human values to a deeper level can translate into a more inter-connected global community. Civil society organizations are capable of being closely in touch with the individual donors and the full circle of Tawhid, unity, finds its route conveniently and meaningfully more so between donor and recipient. In the meanwhile, official policies of states function in a different realm but can not be compared to the depth that civil organizations envisage at community levels. Public opinion and sentiment of people are

becoming increasingly influential in impacting world affairs. And it is at this exciting moment of history that we are witnessing an invigorating phenomenon of people empowering other people. People-to-people development is being tested and harnessed by local civil society organization and expanding it transitionally.

The Significance of Waqf

The Waqf institution enjoys a long history in Turkey. During the era of Ottomans, it was the Waqf that took care of schools and hospitals including social services. In Islam, Waqf functioned as an endowment or trust established by individuals for a certain aim of benefiting society. For example, women always participated actively in Waqf activities. Ottoman colleges were prominent in the past as Waqf funded and sustained such educational institution. According to a Turkish intellectual in Istanbul, the establishment of nation-state in Modern Turkey meant the beginning of the “execution” of civic society in Turkey. Immediately after the Republic was established at the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the foundations belonging to Waqf were sold and acquired by the state. The state established the so called Directorate of the Waqf and controlled all the funding and money going into the Waqf. Once the state put its hands on that, the Waqf lost its essence and goal in society. However in recent years, the freedom of civic society has improved drastically. The positive atmosphere of change in policy and legal status prompted the establishment of more than fifty private universities in Turkey during the last ten years alone. Currently, there are about a hundred and sixty five universities in Turkey. According to the director of external relations of IHH, she stressed the fact that Waqf is still a strong tradition in Turkish Society.

IHH follows a strategy of combining awareness activities and raising funds. IHH aims at educating the Turkish public on various problems and crisis around the world by tapping on its huge human resource of volunteers across Turkey. Rising awareness to potential donors and charity givers combined with people’s strong religious values and spirituality translates into a formidable potential of financing and funding humanitarian and development projects across national borders.

3. Transnational Activities of IHH

3.1 The Activities of IHH in Gaza

The civilian population of Gaza was living under severe restrictions on movement of people and goods. Hospitals in Gaza suffered from electricity black outs and threatened the lives of babies who relied on electricity-powered incubators. One of the first things international NGOs and IHH did was to supply Gaza hospitals with big electric generators needed for surgery rooms, ICU units, baby incubators and other medical emergencies. Donor agencies of Western countries had already left Gaza after Palestinian elections of 2006. The Palestinian Authority was politically incapacitated because it relied heavily on Western funding. Egypt's Mubarak acted directly on intensifying the siege by closing the Rafah border crossing. The deteriorating human conditions prompted Palestinian and international civil society organizations to voice out condemnation against the death of children in Gaza and demand action.

In May 2010, IHH and global civil society organizations embarked on delivering immediate humanitarian assistance to Gaza on boats of the Freedom Flotilla. The incident of the military attack and subsequent consequences caused changes on the daily life of people in Gaza. The tightening of the closure of Rafah crossing eased. Before the Flotilla tragedy, Rafah crossing used to close for weeks and days on. After May 31st, 2010, Rafah crossing opened six days a week. NGOs from Turkey and other Muslim and non-Muslim countries, started to increase humanitarian and developmental activities in Gaza particularly after the 2008-2009 war on Gaza. IHH established a permanent Office in Gaza. More Turkish NGOs also either opened offices in Gaza, like Yildirim, or established relations with local counterparts such as Kismu Yok Mu. The government-based organization, the Turkish Red Crescent has an office in Gaza. Malaysian and European NGOs from Muslim communities, such as the Malaysian Al Aqsa NGO, Muslims Hands from Britain, decided to establish representative offices in Gaza. These organizations became crucial providers of both humanitarian and development cooperation.

For IHH to distribute its humanitarian programs and development

projects, the networking with local NGOs and municipalities became an essential part of its mechanism and daily activities. The Management of IHH in Gaza exerts efforts in establishing strong working relations with a number of NGOs operating in different fields; from relief programs in marginalized neighbourhoods to health related purposes. Municipalities are always considered potential partners in implementing development projects. Indeed, IHH is regularly approached by municipalities where proposal and applications submitted in the hope for cooperation.

3.2 Humanitarian work

IHH implements a number of humanitarian programs in Gaza Strip. One important program is the sponsoring of more than eleven thousand orphans. Additionally, that extends to offering support of paying university fees to orphans who attend university. In the health area, IHH supplies hospitals with emergency medical supplies in addition to treating injured Palestinians in Turkish hospitals. Medical equipment is procured upon calls of emergency despite the difficulty of border control. However, health-related equipment is comparatively easier to be allowed into Gaza. There is a program aiming at helping poor families especially those who lost their homes during the war on Gaza of late 2008 and early 2009. A financial amount of two thousand Euros was donated to each family of the two thousand recipients. Moreover, during Islamic occasions such as Ramadan and El Adha, IHH carries special programs where IHH staff and Turkish volunteers visit Gaza to donate Zakat Money.

Because the orphan sponsorship is considered a big program, IHH office in Gaza designated a special section to administer work between Istanbul and Gaza. The person in charge of the section is a Turkish woman who is married to a Palestinian and speaks fluent Arabic. Applicants, normally mothers of orphan children, apply for sponsorship in person. The Turkish employee enters the personal details of each applicant on a computer. The data reaches the headquarters of IHH in Istanbul live on line through the use of software. During a visit one morning to the orphan section of IHH office, many women that day arrived from the town of Rafah, south of Gaza. Some of them have a large family consisting of six or seven children. IHH normally sponsors all orphan children belonging to one family. IHH is planning to construct an

orphan village at an expected cost of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The goal of the project will enhance all necessary requirements for orphan children in terms of education, health and daily needs.

During Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha (Haj season), IHH cooperate with the municipalities in distributing food baskets and meat in addition to holding Ramadan tents to host group Iftar (breaking the fast) for poor people. Such activities are part of IHH seasonal programs. The budget of Ramadan program of 2011 in Gaza was forty thousand dollars. According to sources in the Gaza office, two thousand and three hundred food baskets were delivered to poor families in addition to arranging two thousand and seven hundred and fifty Iftar meals throughout the Gaza Strip in Ramadan of 2012. Some cash donations, given through a local Bank, were given to those who are in acute need.⁵⁹

Generally, the visits by IHH staff and volunteers to various regions and communities aim at accomplishing not only the delivery of assistance but also an opportunity to assess needs and raise awareness to the local communities back in Turkey. When Turkish volunteers visited Gaza, they experienced something that normally Gazans do by being forced to suddenly cancel travel plans due to the closure of Rafah crossing. It happened after the incident of August 6th, 2012, when gunmen killed sixteen Egyptian soldiers in Sinai Peninsula.⁶⁰ The Turkish delegation intended to stay for two weeks but ended up spending an additional week. But, the experience left an impact on the group in experiencing, even at one time, something that Palestinians in Gaza have living for years.

3.3 Development Assistance Work

Development is an integral part of the goals and activities of IHH. In Gaza, Palestine, IHH has been implementing development projects as soon as they established an office in city of Gaza. Their development projects include the construction of a hospital in the town of Beit-Hanoun, north of Gaza, at a cost of six hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Another project involved dispatching highly skilled Turkish medical trainers to train Palestinian medical doctors in areas such as surgeries and other medical areas. The dissemination of medical skills are contributing significantly to the training of Palestinian doctors and minimized the cost of sending patients for treatment

outside Gaza. In Education, IHH contributed to the rebuilding of university laboratories, especially IT and engineering Labs at the Islamic University in Gaza. In increasing employment prospects for university graduates, IHH established the Ottoman Centre in Gaza city with cooperation of a local NGO for the purpose of offering computer training and IT skills to enhance the potential in the job market. In the area of income generating for women, few centres were established across the Gaza fashion design, sawing and embroidery for income generating. A housing project for the poor was initiated after the war in February 2009 to rebuild houses destroyed during the war. Local government councils and municipalities became partners with IHH in implementing various infrastructure projects such water networking, digging wells for drinking water, solid waste equipment, and human resource training.

IHH has contributed to cementing the networking between local government and their counterpart in Turkey. The Town of Jabaliya, north of Gaza, has already signed a Twinning Agreement with the city of Umraniye in Istanbul area. Jabaliya has gained a new membership with the Federation of Turkish Municipalities as the first Arab municipality to obtain such a membership in the history of the said Federation. Also, the Palestinian town is now a member of the Turkish Organization of the Federation of Cities and local Regions. Local municipalities are on regular communication with IHH for conducting projects and cooperation. The needs of local government sector are immense. According to IHH in Gaza, the organization does provide some equipment like wheel loaders, trucks but when IHH face too project proposals, and it shares information with the Turkish official assistance agency TICA, Turkish International Cooperation Agency. According to IHH interview in September 2012, TICA is planning to open up a branch office in Gaza.

Aiming at supporting women in employment and income generating, the vocational training centres offer skills in setting up self-income generating small business. For the centre in Rafah town is active and enrolment is normally full, learning sewing, fashion design and embroidery. Training courses are offered with reduced fees. Duration of training courses vary from two months to six months. Some students who show signs of improvements and progress re-enrol again to expand on skills. Some of the more common projects are mushroom cultivation, raising rabbits, aquaculture ponds, sheep rising, farming, etc.

Both offices of IHH in Istanbul and Gaza pointed out to the readiness to work on the reconstruction of Gaza. However, the embargo on construction material doesn't allow such a sizable undertaking to take place current situation. IHH is also willing to cooperate with other Turkish NGOs for the reconstruction of Gaza. Officials express confidence in the support and funding of the people for implementing further development in Gaza. But, the siege is an obstacle. Turkish NGOs in Gaza maintain contacts with each other and TICA in sharing information on ongoing humanitarian and development projects in Gaza.

On the political aspect, Palestinian people are aware of aid and politics as the West Bank and Gaza Strip are considered an area of intense humanitarian and development activities. At the basic level, most people realize the link between politics and aid; whether it is from government or civil society. During a field survey in September of 2012, many Palestinian individuals and intellectuals expressed the notion that international and regional players, both government and civil society, pay special conisation and interest to Palestine for different reasons. When asked about the role of Turkish civil society and in particular IHH, Palestinian opinion leaders and social activists realize that at any rate politics can not be ruled completely from aid even NGO assistance. However, in the case of IHH, Turkey as a country and society enjoys widespread consent on the supposedly political implications. Certainly, many would argue, that Turkey is aiming at an assertive and prominent role in the region. One way of gaining legitimacy to a regional role is the solidarity and support of Palestinian people. "Palestine is the door to the heart and minds of Muslims," as one community leader put it. Turkish government would not directly instruct NGOs what to do in Palestine, but it facilitates and encourages the work of Turkish NGOs in Palestine. Without a doubt, Turkey enjoys a positive advantage among Palestinians. That is why Turkish NGOs, like IHH, finds itself welcomed and encouraged officially and publicly.

Conclusion

The contemporary rise of the civil society in Turkey is experiencing a steady momentum invigorated by Islamic-based values which are part of tradition and daily life of the Turkish people. Economic development of

Turkey and a new climate of political freedom induced a sustained change of ushering a dynamic Turkish civil society today. Spiritual values are a source of sustainable resource for Humanitarian and Development goals. Religious values and norms play a crucial role in motivating individuals and communities to perform charity and pay donations. For local community donors, acts of charity bring meaning and a sense of self-fulfilment in this life and hereafter. The Islamic concept of Tawhid, Unity of God, is central to connecting local communities with their fellow Muslims and Non-Muslims through humanitarian activities and development projects. Members of local communities rely on civil organizations like IHH to transfer the donations and implement programs on their behalf to Muslims and Non-Muslims. IHH organization considers itself as a humanitarian organization based on Islamic values and it enjoys a network of volunteers nation-wide within Turkey.

Politics is said to be pervasively present in the humanitarian and development activities. As we have seen in the body of the paper, scholars argued about the inseparable link between politics and “the humanitarian”. However, we tend to over look the human and emotional factor on the ground where the individual donor, motivated by different reasons, and the impact felt on the recipient. This particular phenomenon stands obvious in the realm of Islamic funding and the appeal is solely made to the individual and his/her sole decision to donate and support the funding. Funding for Western-based NGOs are different where financial flow is more systemized and follow official structure. The goal eventually might end up similar to the Islamic funding in terms of delivery of programs and projects or even surpass their Islamic counterparts due to better managerial expertise. But, the expression and flow of energy behind the direct funding from Zakat and charity generate a dimension of deeper ownership and solidarity between distant communities and that reflects on the nature of connecting diverse communities across national borders. It is more of reaching a pinnacle point of empathy and meaningfulness between the donor and the recipient when the individual donors seeks only a prayer or gratitude on the part of a recipient. As said earlier, politics is involved but there is more to it at the grass-root of donor-recipient level which seems overly overlooked when examining Muslim Civil Society organizations acting presently at global level.

Since the current international system still relies mainly on the organ of

state sovereignty, despite a prevalent weakening of the concept of state in the past two decades due to globalization, the role of civil organizations becomes the more relevant and practical. Civil organizations in Muslim societies could demonstrate flexibility and creative approaches such as the case of IHH in Gaza Strip, Palestine. But, at the same time, further work remains needed in order to address challenges facing such organizations to respond more professionally and institutionally at a global level. It is at this point that our world today is witnessing an emerging new phenomenon of people empowering other people. People-to-people humanitarian and development objectives are being tested and harnessed by local civil society organizations and acting transitionally.

Endnotes

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the civil society movements in the Muslim world across-national borders have attempted to achieve not only the goal of humanitarian assistance but also of sustainable development of the society. An attempt is made on the analysis of the extent to which they base their activities on Islamic values and norms and Muslim networks by which they reach out to a wide segment of the society for the sake of securing local funding.

A case study of a Turkish civil society organization, IHH (The Foundation of Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief) will be made in this study. As IHH has its headquarter in Istanbul, a branch office in Ankara, Turkey and a branch office in Gaza, Palestine, the author's field work both in Turkey and Gaza will be utilized for the above-mentioned analysis. Some results of the field research indicates that the IHH was one of unique organizations that has increased its support for the Palestinian people during critical periods since the 2006 Palestine Legislation Council election while the international aid community neglected its assistance to Gaza and to a certain extent the West Bank for political reasons. The study will shed light on the civil society debate in the Muslim world by demonstrating the extent to which a faith-based civil society activism can function as a development assistance agent beyond humanitarian assistance actors.