

## **Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Islamic Actions and Social Mandates**

### ***Famines***

During 640 A.D., Arabia suffered from serious draught. There were no rains, and as such there was no cultivation. That led to serious famine. There was not a blade of grass to be found anywhere, and as such there was nothing for the animals to graze upon. Because of serious famine conditions the people were involved in great distress. Black dust storms blow over the countryside and that added to the distress of the people. The people from the interior flocked to the cities. There was practically no grain in the market. Ghee, butter and meat disappeared from the markets. It became a serious problem to feed the people.

Umar rose to the occasion. He wrote to the provincial governors asking them to send food-grains to Arabia. Camel loads of foodgrains and other necessities of life came from Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Foodgrains were received from Egypt through the sea as well.

Umar distributed foodgrains and other necessities among the people family wise. Meals were cooked at the State level and all persons from interior of the desert who took refuge in Madina were fed daily at state expense. According to one account as many as 40,000 persons were fed every day.

In view of the resources of his disposal, Umar could afford to have dainty food but he vowed that as long as the famine lasted he would eat only what was available to an Arab of ordinary means. He refused to eat meat, ghee or butter during the period of famine. He ordered that his meal should be cooked with oil. He would eat only the coarsest of food. As a consequence of eating nutritionless food his colour took a blacker hue. His stomach would rumble, but he said: "O stomach you may rumble as much as you like, but as long as the famine persists I cannot allow you anything dainty". One day some ghee came to the market and his servant purchased the ghee for him. When Umar came to know of that he refused to have anything to do with such a luxury. A son of his cooked some meat one day and offered him the dish. He refused to eat it. So strict was Umar that during the period of famine he refused to go near his wives.

At night he would move about from street to street to see for himself that all had been fed. Whenever any case of hardship came to his notice he would rush relief immediately. He would in most cases carry the relief goods on his own back. After taking his rounds, Umar would pray to God till late hours of the night. He would then wake up in the early hours of the morning, and again pray before going to the mosque to lead the morning prayer.

Addressing the congregation Umar would say:

"I cannot say whether this calamity is because of the lapses of the Caliph or the sins of the people. Whosoever is to be blamed let us repent, and pray to God for relieving us of this misery."

There is a story on record that one Bilal bin Haris of the Mazni tribe slaughtered a goat. There was nothing but bones in the corpse. Bilal had the bones ground and fed on them. At night he saw the Holy Prophet in a dream. The Holy Prophet asked him:

"Go and give Umar my message. He is firm in the way of religion. He should further press religion into service for the aversion of this distress."

Bilal bin Haris called on Umar and delivered him the message of the Holy Prophet. Umar could not exactly follow what exactly was the significance of the message. He felt that perhaps the Holy Prophet was referring to some apse on his part. That made him shudder with the fear of God. Umar went to the mosque and enquired whether they had noticed any deficiency in him. They said that they had not seen any

weakness in him. They enquired as to what was the occasion for the question. Thereupon Umar asked Bilal to narrate his dream. After Bilal had narrated his dream, one of the Companions stood up to say: "Amirul Muminin there is nothing against you in this message. The Holy Prophet prescribed the prayer of Istisqa for praying to God for being relieved of any calamity. The message of the Holy Prophet is that you offer special Istisqa prayers."

Umar fixed a day for the offering of Istisqa prayers. The faithful were required to offer the special prayer on the specified day throughout the Muslim dominions. On the day fixed all the Muslims in Madina assembled in a plain outside Madina and offered the Istisqa prayers. In the sermon on this occasion Umar said:

"We have erred. Let us repent and ask of forgiveness from God. O Allah Thee alone do we worship and from Thee alone do we ask help. O Allah forgive us for our sins. Have mercy on us, and be pleased with us."

It is related that within a week of the special prayer clouds appeared on the sky and there were heavy rains. Umar then led a thanksgiving prayer. After the rains things changed for the better and the famine was over. Umar led the people during the crisis of the famine with considerable credit.

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*Source : Alim.org-Umar bin al-Khattab History*