

A Study of Public Welfare Initiatives Outlined in the Constitution of Medina

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Abstract

From the dawn of human history, people have consistently sought shelter, protection, and sustenance (food, clothing, education and health care). Throughout various stages of societal development, including those in the Pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, the broader Middle Eastern region, and transitional periods, individuals have often been compelled to submit to monarchs or ruling elites to fulfill their basic needs. Regardless of caste, creed, biological differences, color, or religion, the innate human desire for basic rights and a stable system of governance has persisted.

Keywords: Public Welfare, Constitution of Medina, Human history, Basic rights.

Introduction

The advent of Islam marked a profound transformation in the political and social landscape of the region. The Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) introduced a more comprehensive understanding of public welfare, which encompassed fundamental needs such as security, protection, food, shelter, and clothing. This was epitomized in the Constitution of Medina, the first written constitution in Islamic history, which outlined and implemented principles of justice and social welfare, setting a new standard for governance and societal organization.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) introduced a system markedly different from the prior concept of monarchy, which was characterized by absolute power and a centralized, often autocratic approach. Instead, the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) established a system where the ruling authority was seen as a representative of the people. This system was inclusive, designed to benefit all of humanity, and based on principles of humanitarianism, with fundamental rights to individual security and responsibilities clearly defined.

In this model, the ruling authority was expected to act not as a distant and detached figure, but as a vigilant leader who remained closely connected to the common people. This ruler prioritized the public's interests over personal gains, frequently engaging with the general

populace to address their needs and concerns. The article in question will explore this model of governance, showcasing it as a successful example of a welfare state that emphasizes inclusivity and unity on a universal scale.

Public Welfare Initiatives in the Constitution of Medina

1. The System of Public Welfare

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) established the entire system of public welfare in the State of Medina. He (blessings and peace be upon him) also ensured its protection under the guardianship of Allah and His Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him).

Jabir b. Abd Allah (may Allah be well pleased with him) narrated:

بَيْنَمَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَاعِدٌ فِيمَا بَيْنَ الصَّحَابَةِ، أَنَاهُ صَبِيٌّ، فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، إِنَّ أُمَّي تَسْتَكْسِيكَ دِرْعًا، وَلَمْ يَكُنْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِلَّا قَمِيصُهُ، فَقَالَ الصَّبِيُّ: مِنْ سَاعَةٍ إِلَى سَاعَةٍ يَطْهَرُ يَعُدُّ وَقْتًا آخَرَ، فَعَادَ إِلَى أُمِّهِ، فَقَالَتْ: قَالَ لَه: إِنَّ أُمَّي تَسْتَكْسِيكَ الدَّرْعَ الَّذِي عَلَيْكَ. فَدَخَلَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ دَارَهُ وَنَزَعَ قَمِيصَهُ وَأَعْطَاهُ وَقَعَدَ عُرْيَانًا، فَأَذَّنَ بِلَالٌ لِلصَّلَاةِ فَأَنْتَضَرُوا، فَلَمْ يَخْرُجْ.

A woman sent her son to the presence of the Noble Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) and requested that he be given a shirt. The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) advised to wait as it wasn't available at the moment but to return later. When the boy went back, his mother instructed him to tell the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) that if not another shirt, then his own body shirt would suffice. The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) then went home, took off his shirt, and gave it to the boy. Due to the absence of any other clothes, he remained at home. Bilal (may Allah be well pleased with him) called for prayer, and the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) was unable to attend the prayer due to this. (When the Companions (may Allah be well pleased with him) expressed concern and investigated, this situation became clear.)¹

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) is managing the kingdom of the entire universe, giving orders, narrating traditions, giving laws, giving systems, giving governance, and providing allowances, taking responsibility, and there is only one shirt on his body, and nothing else. He Said, "This responsibility belongs to Muhammad Mustafa, that if someone in my state has no clothing, then Muhammad Mustafa provides him with clothing."

From this incident, it becomes evident:

1. The woman's request to the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) for a shirt demonstrates that even an ordinary member of Islamic society was aware that the responsibility of public welfare lies with the head of the state.
2. Despite not having any other clothes available, the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) set a practical example by giving his blessed shirt to the needy woman, illustrating to Muslim leaders how far they should go in caring for their subjects and fulfilling their basic needs.
3. As long as rulers continue to behave in this manner, the system of public welfare will remain akin to that of the State of Medina. There, the ideals and glimpses of Medina's governance will continue to inspire society, ensuring its prosperity and advancement on the

path of progress.

2. Emphasis on Charity and Support for the Needy

The Qur'an emphasizes charity and support for the needy in *Sura al-Baqara*, verse 261,

﴿مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةُ حَبَّةٍ﴾

œThe example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is that of a grain (of wheat or corn), which grows into seven ears; in each ear, there are a hundred grains.Σ

3. The Importance of Education in Building a Prosperous Society

The education underscored the belief that knowledge is essential for building a prosperous and enlightened society. By prioritizing education, the Medina State set a standard for future generations and civilizations.

The Qur'an states in *Sura al-'Alaq*, verses 1 to 5,

﴿اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝١ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝٢ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝٣ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝٤ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝٥﴾

œRead in the Name of your Lord, Who created (everything). He created human being from a leech-like mass (clinging to the endometrium of the uterus). Read, and your Lord is the Most-Generous, Who taught (to write) by the pen, Who taught human being what he did not know.Σ

Education was a cornerstone of the Medina State. The constitution encouraged the establishment of an education system and laid the groundwork for what would become the first university in the Islamic world. This emphasis on education played a crucial role in the intellectual and cultural development of society.

The Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) said,

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ.

“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim (man and woman).”²

Islam has prescribed fighting against ignorance and illiteracy. The Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) made the prisoners of the battle of Badr to pay the ransom for their freedom in the form of teaching the Medinan children.

It is stated on the authority of @mir:

كَانَ فِدَاءُ أَهْلِ بَدْرٍ أَرْبَعِينَ أَوْقِيَةً أَرْبَعِينَ أَوْقِيَةً. فَمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ عَشْرَةَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ الْكِتَابَةَ؛

The ransom money of the people (prisoners) of Badr was forty ounces of silver. However, if someone was unable to pay the ransom money, he taught writing to ten Muslims.

فَكَانَ زَيْدٌ بِنُ ثَابِتٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ مِمَّنْ عَلَّمَ.

Zayd b. Thabit (may Allah be well pleased with him) was amongst the Companions who were taught writing.³

4 Military and Defense Strategies

4.1 Protecting the State and Its Citizens

The Medinan Constitution included provisions for the defense and protection of the state. These provisions outlined the responsibilities of the community in maintaining security and safeguarding the state against external threats. Article 14 of the Constitution states,

«وَإِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لَا يَتْرُكُونَ مُفْرَحًا، بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يُعْطَوْهُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فِي فِدَاءٍ أَوْ عَقْلِ».

The believers shall not neglect to give (aid) to a debtor amongst them who is not entitled to

support according to tribal law, but will aid him according to what is customary in matters of ransom or blood money⁴.

Article 44 of the Constitution says:

«وَأَنَّ بَيْنَهُمُ النَّصْرَ عَلَى مَنْ حَارَبَ أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الصَّحِيفَةِ».

All (parties, the Muslims and the Jews) must help one another against anyone who imposes aggression against any party to this treaty (for the sake of its defence and security)⁵.

The Prophet Muhammad's approach to defense was characterized by strategic planning and the establishment of a well-organized military force, He emphasized the importance of preparedness while also advocating for peace and diplomacy.

The Qur'an states in *Sura al-Anfal*, verse 60,

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهَبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ﴾

œAnd prepare against them whatever (human resources and economic and military) strength you can, and warhorses, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah, and your enemy. Σ⁶

4.2 The Balance Between Peace and Preparedness

The Medinan Constitution struck a balance between peace and preparedness. While it provided for the defense of the state, it also encouraged peaceful relations with neighboring tribes and communities, reflecting the Prophet's commitment to peace and stability.

Article 22 of the Constitution states,

«وَأَنَّ كُلَّ غَازِيَةٍ غَزَتْ مَعَنَا يَعْقُبُ بَعْضُهَا بَعْضًا».

All raiding parties that raid along with us will take turns with each other, relieving one another. (One patrol is to relieve another by turns, so that none is on duty without rest.)⁷

Article 23 of the Constitution states,

«وَأَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُجِدُ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ بِمَا نَالَ دِمَاءَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ».

The believers will fully retaliate on each other's behalf in the case of death or injury incurred while fighting in the cause of Allah. (The state is responsible for avenging any of its citizens killed by the enemies.)⁸

5. Relevance to Modern Society

5.1 The Enduring Relevance of the Medinan Constitution's Principles to Contemporary Challenges

The principles of the Medinan Constitution are as relevant today as they were in the 7th century. In a world grappling with issues of inequality, injustice, and conflict, the constitution offers valuable insights and solutions.

The Qur'an states in *Sura al-Nisa'*, verse 135:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوِّمِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ﴾

œO Believers! Be maintainers of justice and be witnesses for the sake of Allah, even if it is against yourselves, or (your) parents and near relatives. Σ

5.2 The Constitution as a Solution to Current Societal Issues

By embracing the principles of equality, justice, and coexistence enshrined in the Medinan Constitution, modern societies can address many of their current challenges. The document

provides a framework for creating inclusive and harmonious communities.

Article 15 of the Constitution states,

«وَأَنْ لَا يُخَالِفَ مُؤْمِنٌ مُؤْمِنًا دُونَهُ».

“A believer shall not form an alliance with the ally (or client) of another believer to the exclusion of the latter.”

In summary, we have explored the historical significance of the Medinan Constitution, its role in creating a multicultural and egalitarian society, its administrative and judicial systems, its social welfare and education initiatives, its military and defense strategies, and its enduring relevance to modern society.

The Medinan Constitution stands as a testament to the timeless wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) and the enduring values of justice, equality, and coexistence. Its principles continue to inspire and guide us in our pursuit of a better world.

The Qur’an states in *Sura al-Tawba*, verse 105:

﴿وَقُلْ أَعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

œAnd say: ‘Perform your deeds (as you wish). Allah will see your deeds, as will the Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) and the believers.Σ

I urge all of us to reflect on the wisdom of the Medinan Constitution and consider how its principles can be applied in our own contexts. By doing so, we can work towards building a more just, peaceful, and prosperous world. The Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) said,

خَيْرُ النَّاسِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ.

“The best of people are those that bring most benefit to the rest of mankind.”⁹

Conclusion:

As we reflect on the Constitution of Medina and its profound principles, it becomes clear that its relevance transcends time and place. This historic document not only established a framework for governance but also laid the foundation for a society rooted in justice, mutual respect, and the welfare of all its members. The Constitution of Medina is a testament to the visionary leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his commitment to creating a harmonious and inclusive community. Its principles resonate with the core values of a modern welfare state—ensuring social justice, protecting individual rights, and fostering communal solidarity.

By emphasizing collective responsibility, equality before the law, and the protection of vulnerable groups, the Constitution mirrors many of the ideals we strive for in contemporary governance. In today’s world, where divisions and inequalities often threaten social cohesion, the lessons from the Constitution of Medina are more pertinent than ever. It reminds us of the importance of inclusive policies, the necessity of safeguarding the rights of minorities, and the imperative of fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. These principles are not only essential for building a just society but are also fundamental to the concept of a welfare state.

As we continue to navigate the complexities of our modern societies, let us draw inspiration from this early charter of human rights and governance. Let us strive to uphold the values of

justice, compassion, and mutual support in our policies and practices. By doing so, we honor the legacy of the Constitution of Medina and contribute to the creation of a more equitable and harmonious world.

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¹ Al-Tha'labi (427h), *al-Kashf wa al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, 6/96, al-Baghawi (516h), *Al-Tafsir*, 3/112.

² Sunan Ibn Majah, Ch: The virtue of the scholars, and encouragement to seek knowledge, 1:81, §224.

³ Set forth by •Ibn Sa'd in *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, 2:22.

⁴ Set forth by •Abu ʿUbayd al-Qasim b. Sallam in *Kitab al-Amwal*, p. 261 §518. •Humayd b. Zanjawayh in *Kitab al-Amwal*, 2:468 §750.

⁵ Set forth by •Abu ʿUbayd al-Qasim b. Sallam in *Kitab al-Amwal*, p. 263 §518. •Humayd b. Zanjawayh in *Kitab al-Amwal*, 2:469 §750. •Ibn Hisham in *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, 3:34. •al-Suhayli in *al-Rawd al-Unuf*, 4:243. •Ibn Sayyid al-Nas in *Uyun al-Athar*, 1:228. •Ibn Kathir in *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya*, 3:225. •al-Salihi in *Subul al-Huda wa al-Rishad*, 3:556.

⁶ Qur'an, 8:60

⁷ Set forth by •Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallam in *Kitab al-Amwal*, p. 262 §518. •Humayd b. Zanjawayh in *Kitab al-Amwal*, 2:468 §750. •Ibn Hisham in *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, 3:33.

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