

Compatibility between the OIE standards and the requirements of Islamic Law with special reference to the prevention of cruelty to animals during transport and slaughter

Foreword by the Director General

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to requirements of Islamic law that relate to the humane handling of animals, including at transport and slaughter. By encouraging dialogue between veterinary services and religious authorities, the OIE aims to raise awareness of the importance of animal welfare and to reduce animal suffering globally.

Since 2002 the OIE has recognised the need to set international animal welfare standards with the objective of improving not only animal health but also animal welfare, all around the world. Consistent with its mandate, the focus of OIE standards is on international trade.

In many countries there is no veterinary legislation as a basis for the implementation of animal welfare standards. Often, the first step is to introduce legislation protecting animals against cruel treatment. The OIE, through the adoption of standards, encourages its 178 Members to go beyond this stage and to implement standards for humane treatment of animals in such key areas as livestock transport, slaughter, and killing for disease control purposes. The Veterinary Services are key players in improving both animal health and welfare.

Sometimes the media present shocking reports on events linked to animal transport and handling at abattoirs and question whether the OIE animal welfare standards are compatible with the requirements of Islamic Law.

This paper concludes that the OIE standards are compatible with the requirements of Islamic Law, which call for the protection of animals against cruel practices and make specific provisions for humane slaughter.

The OIE provides the paper to Members as a basis for discussion between the Veterinary Services and religious authorities as appropriate, with the objective of raising awareness of the importance of animal welfare and the steps that can be taken, consistent with Islamic Law, to reduce animal suffering.

I thank the OIE Animal Welfare Working Group for producing this paper and in particular recognise the contribution of Dr Hassan Aidaros and Dr S. Abdul Rahman, who are members of the Working Group, animal welfare experts and committed practising Moslems.

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Introduction

Islam is a comprehensive religion guiding the lives of its followers through sets of rules governing the personal, social and public aspects through the verses of the Holy Qur'an and Hadiths, the compilation of the traditions of Prophet Mohammed (*pbuh*), the two main documents which serve as guidelines.

In Islam, the law is a privileged means of access to the sacred. For most Muslims, Islamic normativity (*fiqh* or *shari'a*) is an essential part of being a Muslim. The demand for and production of authoritative rulings is one form of social expression of normative Islam.

The relevance of animal welfare under Islam

Islam provides considerable support for the importance of animal welfare. There is a rich tradition of the Prophet Mohammad's (*pbuh*) concern for animals to be found in the Hadith and Sunna and Islam provides considerable support for the importance of animal welfare.

The Qur'an is explicit, with regard to using animals for human purposes. A closer look at the teachings of the Qur'an and tradition reveals teachings of kindness and concern for animals. Nonetheless, the Qur'an, clearly supports the use of animals, including for food.

For example:

- And cattle He has created for you (men); from them ye derive warmth and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. **Surrah An-Nahl 16:5**
- And they carry your heavy loads to lands that ye could not (otherwise) reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful. **Surrah An-Nahl 16:7**
- And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and as an adornment; And he has created other things of which ye have no knowledge. **Surrah An-Nahl 16:8**
- We have made animals subject to you, that ye may be grateful. **Surrah Al Haj 22:36**
- There is not a moving (living) creature on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book, then unto their Lord they (all) shall be gathered. **Surrah Al-Anam 6:38**
- Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praise all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise, and Allah knows well all that they do. **Surrah An-Noor 24:41**

We now have a view of animals that shows them not merely as resources, but as creatures dependent on God (Allah) organized into social groups and, most importantly, engaged in the active worship of Allah.

Animals are seen to have their own lives and purpose, valuable to themselves and to Allah above and beyond any material value they may provide to humanity.

The Qur'an is not the only Islamic source for messages of kindness towards animals.

There is a rich tradition of the Prophet Mohammed's (*pbuh*) concern for animals to be found in the Hadith and Sunna. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*):

- Condemned the beating of animals and forbade striking, branding, or marking them on the face.
- He cursed and chastised those who mistreat animals and gave praise to those who showed kindness;
- He also instituted radical changes against the practice of cutting off the tails and humps of living animals for food.

One Hadith quotes Muhammad (*pbuh*) as saying:

A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being

Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was especially vocal in his disapproval of the cruel practices of notching and slitting of ears of animals and the practice of putting painful rings around the necks of camels.

Below are just a few well-known examples from the *hadith* (traditions):

- “There is a reward (ajr) for helping any living creature.” (Bukhari and Muslim)
- “It is a great sin for man to imprison those animals which are in his power.” (Muslim)
- “The worst of shepherds is the ungentle, who causes the beasts to crush or bruise one another.” (Muslim)
- You will not have secure faith until you love one another and have mercy on those who live upon the earth.” (Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawud)
- “Fear God in these mute animals, and ride them when they are fit to be ridden, and let them go free when ... they [need to] rest.” (Abu Dawud)
- “There is no man who kills a sparrow or anything beyond that, without its deserving it, but God will ask him about it.” (Ahmad and al-Nasai)
- The grievous things are: shirk (polytheism); disobedience to parents; the killing of breathing beings ...” (Bukhari and Muslim)
- “May god curse anyone who maims animals.” (ibn al-Athir)
- “Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself.”

Islam and rules concerning the slaughter of animals

The humane slaughter of animals is strongly supported in the Islamic tradition. For example, Sahih Muslim (Book 21, Chapter 11, Number 4810) records Mohammad (*pbuh*) saying:

‘Verily Allah has enjoined goodness to everything; so when you kill, kill in a good way and when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way. So every one of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably.’

Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) has also said:

When one of you slaughters, let him complete it, “meaning that one should sharpen the knife well and feed, water, and soothe the animal before killing it”.

He also said “Do you intend inflicting death on the animal twice - once by sharpening the knife within its sight, and once by cutting its throat?”

Islam has also laid down Other Rules for humane slaughter, including that:

1. Animals should have a preslaughter rest, and be well fed and well looked after at the point of slaughter.
2. The animals must be alive or deemed to be alive at the time of slaughter.
3. Slaughter must be performed by a Muslim (who is of sound mind, mature, and fully understands the Islamic procedure and conditions for slaughtering of animals).
4. Animals that are slaughtered should be securely restrained, particularly the head and neck, before cutting the throat.

5. Operator competence is of great importance in order to carry out satisfactory Halal slaughter.
6. Slaughtering tools and other implements used must be for the slaughter of Halal animals only.
7. The knife must be razor sharp and without blemishes and damage. For animals with normal necks, the act of slaughter must begin with an incision on the animal's neck just before the glottis, and for animals with long necks such as chicken, turkeys, ostriches, camels etc., the incision must be before the glottis.
8. The animal's trachea and oesophagus must be severed. The spinal cord should not be cut and the head not severed completely so as to induce immediate and massive haemorrhage. In certain mazhab (school of thought), uttering the phrase "bismillah" immediately before the slaughter is compulsory. In others, such utterance is highly encouraged.
9. Slaughtering must be done once only. The slaughtering implement must not be lifted off the animal during slaughtering. Any lifting is construed as one act of slaughter. Multiple acts of slaughter on one animal are prohibited.
10. Slaughter the animal in such a way that its life departs quickly and it is not left to suffer.
11. Bleeding must be spontaneous and complete.
12. Animals should not be shackled and hoisted before bleeding.
13. Hoisting should be done only after the animal has lost consciousness. Restraining equipment should be comfortable for the animal.
14. Further preparation and dressing of the carcass must be delayed until all signs of life and cerebral reflex have disappeared.

Shackling and hoisting conscious animals seems to violate both the humane intent of Islamic slaughter law, and Prophet Muhammad's (*pbuh*) comments on the process of slaughter.

Eating meat produced using cruel methods violates the Prophet Muhammad's (*pbuh*) general precept to cause animals no pain before their slaughter, as well as more specific injunctions regarding the treatment of food animals. Indeed, if animals have been subjected to cruelty in transport and slaughter, or to general cruelty, meat from them is considered by Islam as impure and unlawful to eat (Haram). The flesh of animals killed by cruel methods (Al-Muthiah) is carrion (Al-Mujaththamah). Even if these animals have been slaughtered in the strictest Islamic manner, if cruelties were otherwise inflicted on them, their flesh is still forbidden (Haram) food.

Oh, ye messengers! Eat of the good things {tayyibat} and do righteous deeds. Surely, I know what you do." (Qur'an 23:51).

Oh believers! Eat what We have provided for you of lawful and good things, and give thanks for Allah's favour, if it is He whom you serve. (Qur'an 2:172; 16:114).

The word 'Tayyib', translated as 'good', 'pure', 'wholesome', etc. and means pure both in the physical and the moral sense.

In summary, the main counsel of Islam for the slaughter of animals for food is to do it in the least painful manner. All the Islamic laws on the treatment of animals, including the method of slaughter, are based on compassion, fellow-feeling and benevolence.

What is prevalent today?

Many current practices are not in accordance with the above teachings and may result in great cruelty to animals.

Handling of animals before and during transport is often cruel. Some animals are marched on foot for several days. During such transport animals may lose weight and may be beaten unnecessarily. Many animals are not fed and watered en route. Animals – young and old, big or small – may be tied in twos and fours in order to reduce the number of animal minders or personnel on the trail. Such tying results in injury and fatigue to the animals. Some animals are beaten and forced to move quickly in order to reach markets and abattoirs on time. Those that fall down may be whipped to force them to rise.

Similarly, needless suffering is inflicted on animals that are transported three or four days together in overcrowded, ill-ventilated, trucks, especially in hot, humid weather.

Harsh conditions also occur at slaughter plants. Animals may be held in primitive facilities without shade, and animals may be restrained by short tethers. At the point of slaughter, animals are often struck and beaten to make them enter the slaughter facilities.

What needs to be done?

Many Muslims and Islamic religious leaders are not aware of the cruelty that is routinely inflicted on animals during transport, pre-slaughter and at slaughter in many Islamic countries. There is an urgent need to sensitise all Muslims to the teachings on animal welfare in the Quran and the Hadiths. This approach is bound to be more effective in influencing the majority of Muslims in the livestock trade especially the slaughter man in treating animals more humanely. This needs to be done by intervention at the highest level by Religious bodies and organisations, which could be most effective in giving rulings (fatwas) on this issue.

Progress might be achieved by taking the following measures.

1. A campaign is needed to apprise religious leaders of the current cruelty which occurs during transport and slaughter, for example by slides and videos. This should be done by competent and knowledgeable individuals who are also aware of the Islamic principles of animal welfare, preferably by Muslims in order to give authenticity to their claims.
2. The creation of animal welfare legislation, including animal transport and slaughter, according to the OIE standards and Islamic principles.
3. Government officials in charge of livestock, especially at abattoirs, should be sensitised to the concepts of animal welfare and how these relate to Islamic principles.
4. Abattoirs should be equipped with the facilities required for the good application of animal welfare standards, including unloading facilities, slaughtering boxes, and well-trained personnel to implement correct Halal slaughter.
5. The OIE animal welfare standards, especially those dealing with land transport and slaughter of animals for human consumption which were adopted in 2005 by OIE Members, need to be more strictly implemented by governments.
6. The inclusion of animal welfare as a subject in the veterinary curriculum should be encouraged, including by making available a model syllabus such as that used in the veterinary schools of India.

The OIE encourages Veterinary Services to enter into dialogue with religious authorities with the objective of raising awareness of the importance of animal welfare and reducing animal suffering globally.