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Saudi Arabia's Permanent Council of Senior Scholars on Takfīr¹

All praise is due to Allāh, and may prayers and peace be upon the messenger of Allāh and upon his family, his Companions, and whoever follows his guidance.

The Permanent Council of the Senior Scholars of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during its forty-ninth meeting which convened in Taif beginning on 4/2/1419 Hijrah (corresponding to July 26, 1998), discussed and reviewed what seems to be prevalent in many Islamic countries of Takfīr (declaring fellow Muslims to be disbelievers) and bombings. Such concepts eventually develop into bloodshed and the devastation of structures. We have looked into the dangers of this matter and what results from it innocent souls being murdered, destroying wealth and property, terrorizing people, and infringing upon national safety and security. The Permanent Council felt it necessary to put forth a clarification and explain the ruling of this issue (Takfīr) as a way of showing sincere concern to Allāh and His servants and as a pardon to the non-Muslims residing in Muslim lands. We hope to thereby remove the doubts and confusion that may have crept into the understandings of some people. So we say, beseeching Allāh for correctness and success:

First, Takfīr is a legislative ruling that is to be referred back to Allāh and His messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). So, just like saying other things are permissible, forbidden, or obligatory are decisions for only Allāh and His messenger, likewise is the issue of Takfīr. And not

¹ This fatwā was taken from a book called "Al-Fatāwā Ash-Shar'iyyah fī Al-Qadhāyā Al-'Asriyyah," a collection of various rulings by Muhammad Ibn Fahd Al-Husayn.

everyone who may be described with disbelief, whether in statement or action, is considered to be an absolute disbeliever having left the religion.

Since the issue of Takfīr is a ruling to be made by Allāh or His messenger, it is not permissible for us to declare anyone a disbeliever except someone whom the Quran or Sunnah has clearly and blatantly testified to such a person's absolute disbelief. It is not sufficient in this matter to act solely upon suspicion and assumption due to the dangerous consequences that could arise. Since the religiously prescribed punishments can be deterred and postponed due to mere doubts or not being absolutely sure and their consequences are even less severe than those of Takfīr, then people should be even more hesitant about the pronouncement of Takfīr due to the presence of any uncertainties. For this, the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) warned against making a ruling of disbelief upon someone who may not actually be an absolute disbeliever; he said:

أَيُّمَا امْرِئٍ قَالَ لِأَخِيهِ: يَا كَافِرٌ، فَقَدْ بَاءَ بِهَا أَحَدُهُمَا إِنْ كَانَ كَمَا قَالَ وَإِلَّا رَجَعَتْ
عَلَيْهِ

“Anyone who says to his brother, ‘You disbeliever!’ it (such a judgment of disbelief) then falls back upon one of them – he is either as he (the accuser) said or it falls back upon himself.”²

There have been circumstances reported in the Quran and Sunnah of statements, actions, or beliefs that are understood to be disbelief, yet the person they are associated with was not declared to be an absolute disbeliever because of some excuse preventing this. This (pronouncing a judgment of Takfīr) is like other legal rulings in that they are not applied unless and until all of their conditions have been fulfilled and there exists no reasons preventing such a ruling... Also, a Muslim may utter a statement of disbelief out of extreme joy, anger, etc. yet he is not considered a disbeliever because he did not actually believe and intend what he may have said. This is just like what has been reported in the story of the man who said:

² Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 6104) and Muslim (no. 111) from the ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه).

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ عَبْدِي، وَأَنَا رَبُّكَ

“Oh Allāh, You are my servant and I am Your Lord!”³

He made this mistake only after being overcome with extreme happiness.

When such a ruling is made against a Muslim leader or ruler, then the issue is even greater because of the outcomes a ruling like this produces like people rebelling against them, taking up weapons against them, public chaos and bloodshed – all of which corrupt the servants and their nation. Because of such outcomes, the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) prohibited rebelling against leadership, saying:

إِلَّا أَنْ تَرَوْا كُفْرًا بَوَاحًا عِنْدَكُمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ فِيهِ بُرْهَانٌ

“...unless you see clear and absolute disbelief from them for which you have evidence from Allāh to support you in that.”⁴

His statement, “unless you see” indicates that mere assumptions and rumors are not sufficient.

His statement, “disbelief” indicates that committing evil, crimes, sins, even major sins, is not sufficient, such as if he is oppressive, drinks alcohol, gambles, or commits other forbidden sins.

His statement, “clear and absolute” indicates that an act of disbelief that is not completely apparent and explicit is not sufficient.

His statement, “for which you have evidence from Allāh to support you in that” indicates that there must be an explicit supporting proof that is authentic, clear in its evidence. So, a proof with a weak chain of narration for example is not sufficient, nor is a proof that its evidence isn’t entirely clear and applicable.

³ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 6309) and Muslim (no. 2747) from the ḥadīth of Anas Ibn Mālik (رضي الله عنه).

⁴ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 7056) and Muslim (no. 1709) from the ḥadīth of ‘Ubādah Ibn al-Ṣāmit (رضي الله عنه).

His statement, “from Allāh” indicates that regardless of the statement of any scholar – no matter what level he may have achieved in religious knowledge and trustworthiness – if he does not have a clear explicit proof from the Book of Allāh or the Sunnah of His messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to support his statement, then it is rejected. All of these conditions show the danger and severity of this matter of Takfīr.

To summarize, rushing to pass a ruling against someone as being a disbeliever is a very dangerous issue because of the statement of Allāh (ﷻ):

﴿ قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَّنَ وَالْإِثْمَ وَالْبَغْيَ بِغَيْرِ
الْحَقِّ وَأَنْ تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزَّلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

Say: “Indeed, my Lord has only forbidden immoral sins, whether committed openly or secretly, sinning (of all kinds), transgression without right, that you join partners (in worship) with Allāh for which He has sent down no authority, and that you say about Allāh what you do not know.”

[Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:33]

Second, this incorrect belief (Takfīr) frequently develops into other crimes such as further declaring people’s blood lawful to spill, violating people’s honor, plundering private and public wealth and property, bombing homes and structures, and the devastation of buildings.

These acts and others like them are completely forbidden by Islamic legislation according to the consensus of all Muslims due to what they contain of violating the sanctity of innocent people, the sanctity of wealth, and that of safety and security. They infringe upon people’s rights to live their lives safe and sheltered in their homes, during their work and recreations. They destroy the basic well-being without which no people could live their lives.

Islam has protected the Muslims' wealth, honor, and lives and has forbidden any form of violation against them. Islam is very strict in this regard and they are from the last things the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) advised his nation with. He said in his Farewell Pilgrimage Sermon:

إِنَّ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَأَمْوَالَكُمْ وَأَعْرَاضَكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ حَرَامٌ كَحَرَمَةِ يَوْمِكُمْ هَذَا فِي شَهْرِكُمْ هَذَا فِي بَلَدِكُمْ هَذَا

“Certainly, your blood, wealth, and honor are sacred to each of you just as the sanctity of this day of yours in this month of yours in this city of yours (Mecca).”

He then said:

أَلَا هَلْ بَلَّغْتُ؟ اللَّهُمَّ فَاشْهَدْ

“Have I not conveyed (the complete message)? Oh Allāh, be witness to this.”⁵

He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said:

كُلُّ الْمُسْلِمِ عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِ حَرَامٌ دَمُهُ وَمَالُهُ وَعَرَضُهُ

“Every Muslim is sacred to another Muslim – his blood, wealth, and honor.”⁶

And he said:

اتَّقُوا الظُّلْمَ فَإِنَّ الظُّلْمَ ظُلُمَاتٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

“Beware of committing oppression for oppression will be darkness on the Day of Resurrection.”⁷

Allāh has threatened whoever kills an innocent person with the harshest of threats. He (ﷺ) says:

⁵ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1741) and Muslim (no. 1679) from the ḥadīth of Abū Bakrah (رضي الله عنه).

⁶ Recorded by Muslim (no. 2564) from the ḥadīth of Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه).

⁷ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2447) and Muslim (no. 2579) from the ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) and Muslim also recorded it from the ḥadīth of Jābir (رضي الله عنه) (no. 2578).

﴿ وَمَنْ يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاؤُهُ جَهَنَّمُ خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَلَعَنَهُ
وَأَعَدَّ لَهُ عَذَابًا عَظِيمًا ﴾

And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein. Allāh is angry with him and curses him, and He has prepared a great punishment for him.

[Sūrah al-Nisā', 4:93]

And He (ﷺ) says with regards to a non-Muslim living legally under a Muslim government:

﴿ وَإِنْ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمٍ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ مِيثَاقٌ فَدْيَةٌ مُسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ وَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ
مُؤْمِنَةٍ ﴾

And if he belonged to a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance, then compensation (blood-money) must be paid to his family, and a believing slave must be freed.

[Sūrah al-Nisā', 4:92]

So, if a nonbeliever who has been guaranteed safety is killed even in an accident, yet blood-money and expiation are still required for such an accident, then how about when he's killed intentionally?! Of course the crime would be worse and the sin greater. It's also been authentically reported that Allāh's messenger (ﷺ) said:

مَنْ قَتَلَ مُعَاهِدًا لَمْ يَرِحْ رَائِحَةَ الْجَنَّةِ

“Whoever kills a Mu'āhid will not even smell the fragrance of paradise.”⁸

Third, after the Permanent Council has clarified the ruling of making Takfīr of people with no supporting evidence from the Book of Allāh or the Sunnah of His messenger (ﷺ), the comprehensive dangers of such a ruling, and the sins and evils it causes; the Council then further declares before the world that Islam is free of this corruptive creed. And as for what occurs in some countries of the shedding of innocent blood and

⁸ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 3166) from the ḥadīth of 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Amr (رضي الله عنه).

bombings of structures, they are criminal acts from which Islam is also free. Likewise, every Muslim who believes in Allāh and the Last Day is free of this. It is only the actions of some people of deviated ideologies and misguided religious beliefs. Those particular individuals bear the burden of such sins and crimes themselves. Their actions should neither be attributed to Islam nor to those common Muslims who guide themselves by the true teachings of Islam – those who collectively adhere to the Quran and Sunnah...⁹

⁹ Taken from the magazine: Majallah al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah (no. 56, pgs. 357-362).