



Family members mourning at the funeral of three fighters of the People's Protection Units in Syria's northeastern city of Qamishli on Feb 28. They were killed in clashes with the Islamic State group. Muslim leaders have denounced the brutality and violence of IS which violate the core principles of Islam. AFP pic

Terrorism and cowardly murder

IN this second of a two-part series on 'Extremism, Terrorism and Islam: Juristic and Historical perspectives', Mohammad Hashim Kamali, founding chief executive officer of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia, discusses Islam's views on the taking of life, and how society should address the root causes of radical Islam



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PROTECTION of life (*hifz al-nafs*) — of all human life — is one of the overriding goals and purposes (*maqasid*) of Islam and the Syariah. Human life must be safeguarded as a matter of priority.

"One who saves the life of another," says the Quran, "it would be as if he saves the life of the whole of humankind." (5:35). The text also declares in the same verse: "And one who kills a human being without the latter being guilty of murder or corruption in the land, it would be as if he has killed the whole of humankind." Elsewhere, the Quran

enjoins: "Slay not the life which Allah has made sacrosanct, unless it be in the cause of justice." (17:33).

Al-Bukhari and Muslim, the two most authoritative collections of hadiths, have recorded the following hadith from the prophet: "One who raises arms against us ceases to be one of us." A rehash of the same in another hadith reads that "One who unsheathes his sword against us is not one of us." In yet another hadith, it is provided: "All that belongs to a Muslim is forbidden to other Muslims; his blood, his property and his honour."

Terrorising innocent people that may or may not lead to loss of life and limb constitutes the crime of *hirabah*, which carries the death penalty by the clear text of the Quran (5:33). The prohibition of *hirabah* in this text is conveyed in general and unqualified terms that subsume individuals, groups, and state and non-state parties alike.

Those who commit cowardly murder behind the mask of "Islam" and

imagine they are taking revenge and waging jihad are, in fact, in the eyes of true Islam, murderers. It is despicable to hunt down defenceless people and shoot them in a vicious act of terror simply because they think wrongly, or are hostile to Islam.

The vast majority of Muslims are peace-loving, and judging by the course of events in recent years in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and elsewhere, Muslims are themselves the principal victims of extremism and violence in the name of religion. The victims of crude brutality, violence and indiscriminate drone attacks are often defenceless civilians, women and children.

The chorus of disapproval and condemnation we have seen from Muslim religious and political leaders against the perverse Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq is to be welcomed. Muslim leaders, including heads of state, religious figures, international organisations and fatwa councils, such as the Majlis Ula-

ma Indonesia, the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia and the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, to mention a few, denounced the brutality and violence of the IS group as violative of the core principles of Islam. Similar voices of condemnation were also expressed within days of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

Condemnation alone will not address the causes of such ugly episodes, which in this case are due to the political mess, power vacuum and failure of good governance in Syria and Iraq, where states failed and social cohesion became absent. Thousands of angry and disillusioned men and women, Sunni, Shia, Kurds and other ethno-religious groups feel that the path of violence is the only one left for them to follow.

Unless the root causes of radical extremism are addressed, radicalism is likely to carry its own momentum. Once a radical group falls by the wayside, discredited or irrelevant, another, often more radical and violent group, emerges to assume the mantle of leadership. This is what IS is to al-Qaeda, by upping the stake in the radicalisation contest and becoming even more destructive and violent than its predecessor.

Rabbi Mark Winer wrote in a 2012 article, "Fundamentalists versus Moderates", that the future of humanity may well depend on the ability of moderates within each religion to overcome their extremist co-religionists. It would appear, he adds, that extremism spawns interfaith bigotry and sanctions violence, war and terrorism. In the twentieth century, more people died in the name of religion than in all of history before. There is a real fear, he added, that the twenty-first century may even eclipse the grisly record for interfaith bigotry and terrorism of the previous century.

A great deal therefore depends

on our understanding of the eternal conflict between extremism and moderation, and upon the strategies the religious moderates devise together to combat their common scourge. It hardly needs to be emphasised that religious education and advice can play a significant role, and providing it becomes an urgent call for the leaders of all the great religions. It should be absolutely clear that massacre and mayhem can never be accepted in the name of Islam, and we all need to be vigilant and decisive on criminality of the kind that has become so frequent and keeps putting the good name of Islam and the vast majority of peaceable Muslims on the line.

It is instructive that the early pioneers of Islam called the Kharijites (literally, Outsiders) by this name, making it clear that they had the choice to change their behaviour and rejoin the community or else to stay as outsiders. The same can be said of *ghulat* (literally, exaggerators, extremists), the name so unmistakably expressive of its purpose, that was given to a small group of Shias who exaggerated in their interpretations of the doctrine of Imamate so as to elevate the first Shia Imam, Ali ibn Abu Talib, to a deity.

One can hardly think that anyone could soil Islam's name so badly as the likes of IS, Boko Haram militants, and the perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. If there be enough realisation of this among the extremists, when they are convinced that they are doing more harm than good to the cause of their religion, as Islamic leaders all over the world are already pointing out, their numbers will eventually diminish, and their nefarious causes will also be exposed for the immense harm and misery they inflict on the uninvolved, innocent masses.