

## On Perpetual Peace, Jefferson's Qur'an, Leviathan and Three Zero Observing International Day for Poverty Eradication

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE  
**ERADICATION  
OF POVERTY**  
OCTOBER 17



The observation of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty originated in 1987 when a massive rally in Paris proclaimed poverty a violation of human rights. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs officially recognized 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in 1992. Since then, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is commemorated on October 17th each year. This year's theme is "Ending Social and Institutional Maltreatment Acting Together for Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies." It is a powerful reminder that our collective action is essential for respecting these rights. People of diverse backgrounds unite annually to express solidarity with underprivileged people, emphasizing the need for collective action. Replicas of a commemorative stone unveiled during the initial gathering serve as focal points for these global observances, including one at the UN Headquarters. This collective action, no doubt, is a testament to our shared commitment to justice, equity, and equality. Can a curious mind and just soul be satisfied with such a one-day yearly observation cum celebration? Is it enough of an initiative to solve critical issues of such magnitude through such 'surface swimming'? Should the collective efforts not dive deeper to find sustainable solutions?

The chosen theme for this year's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, "Ending Social and Institutional Maltreatment Acting Together for Just, peaceful and inclusive societies," is a

powerful call to action. It underscores the necessity for collaborative efforts to eradicate poverty and discrimination, ultimately paving the way for a sustainable future where all requirements are met without compromising the well-being of future generations. The global nature of poverty is a stark reality that connects us all. World Poverty Statistics 2024 depicts the harsh reality of extreme poverty; over 700 million individuals globally survive on under \$1.90 per day, a crisis that disproportionately affects children. The goal to eradicate this injustice by 2030 underlines the vital global effort of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1. The SDG Goal 1 mentions, “End poverty in all its forms everywhere.”

The Global Goals explains that “Eradicating poverty is not a task of charity; it’s an act of justice and the key to unlocking an enormous human potential. Still, nearly half of the world’s population lives in poverty, and lack of food and clean water is killing thousands every single day of the year. Together, we can feed the hungry, wipe out disease, and give everyone a chance to prosper and live a productive and rich life.” However, the Global Goals doesn’t directly comment on Poverty caused due to unjust wars thrust upon many countries and, as a consequence, the destructions, displacements, genocide, and apartheid of selected ethnicities and societies across the globe!

The famous Chinese proverb goes, “The wise see wisdom.” The astute organizations and, more so, the wise men of old and today share their knowledge, expertise, and wisdom, rising above myopic vision and vested interests with a hope to maintain perpetual peace and security and thus aspire for prosperity in societies. Usually, in the current Westphalian governance model, wise men are not at the center of the power or leadership. Thus it is the educated elites—the wise men of the society who need to support the leadership for the benefit of the people to improve their livelihood. With their unbiased knowledge and understanding, these educated elites can guide and influence the leadership's decisions, ensuring that policies and actions are directed towards sustainable poverty eradication and improving people's lives.

In a 1795 book by German philosopher Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (Original German: *Zum Ewigen Frieden. Ein Philosophischer Entwurf*), Kant advances ideas that were associated with democratic, commercial, and institutional peace. His recommendations were somehow represented in the UN in the 1940s. Three of his Definitive Articles were expected to provide a cessation of hostilities and a foundation to build peace. The third article read, “The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality.” This concept of 'universal hospitality' implies that all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of origin, circumstances, or ethnicity. After almost 230 years of the book, the world is still looking for “perpetual peace” and the “rights of men,” but to no avail. Indeed, the Paris Rally’s proclamation of 1987 that poverty

violates “human rights” and “rights of men,” as mentioned in the third article, echoed the noble thoughts of Immanuel Kant.

Thomas Jefferson’s engagement with Islam began with purchasing a copy of the Qur’an in 1765, a significant event that predates his writing of the Declaration of Independence by eleven years and Immanuel Kant’s book by thirty years. His copy of the Qur’an has survived for over 250 years and is available in the Library of Congress. This symbolizes his and early America’s complex relationship with Islam and its adherents. This relationship remains essential today, underscoring the ongoing relevance of historical Quranic teachings, particularly regarding eradicating poverty.

Denise A. Spellberg reveals in her 2013 book, “Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an: Islam and the Founders,” a little-known story of American religious freedom in which Islam played a surprising role. Based on innovative research, Spellberg fascinatingly recounts how a handful of the Founders, Jefferson was foremost among them, drew upon Enlightenment ideas. Regarding the “social contract,” the “governance” of Muslims to approach what had been a hypothetical debate as a practical foundation for governance in America. Her findings mark the beginning of Jefferson’s lifelong interest in Islam. He also took extensive notes on Islam related to English common law. Spellberg mentions that “he sought to understand Islam notwithstanding his disdain for the faith, a sentiment prevalent among his Protestant contemporaries in England and America.”

More than 100 years before Thomas Jefferson purchased a copy of the Qur’an, “Leviathan” was written by the famous English Philosopher Thomas Hobbes. The book was published in 1651. It derives its name from the biblical Leviathan. Leviathan appears in a couple of places in the Bible. For instance, in Psalms 74:14, Leviathan is a multi-headed sea serpent killed by God and given food to the Hebrews in the wilderness. In Isaiah 27:1, it is a serpent and a symbol of Israel’s enemies, whom God will kill. In Job 41, it is a sea monster and a symbol of God’s authority over creation. The book Leviathan, however, concerns the structure of society and legitimate government and is viewed to date as one of the earliest and most influential examples of social contract theory.

The idea of the Three Zero Club came from the campaign of Professor Dr. Yunus to create a world of three Zero. According to him, these are the three major problems the world is facing. The first is global warming. There are only 20 years left to reach or exceed the global temperature of 1.5°C. We must reduce carbon to or near zero emission to start cooling down. The second zero is zero poverty. Currently, wealth is accumulated in the hands of a few and not with people. And the third is the zero unemployment. Apart from other causes, unemployment is rising due to the advancement of efficient AI and other technologies. The answer could be entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is the destination of human beings posits Professor Yunus.

He suggests that instead of becoming unemployed, young people should become entrepreneurs. Zero net carbon emission, zero wealth concentration and poverty once and for all, and zero unemployment by unleashing the power of entrepreneurship. Thus, the three zero clubs for young people.

In *A World of Three Zeros* (2017), Professor Yunus describes the new civilization emerging from the economic experiments his work has helped to inspire. He explains how global companies like McCain, Renault, Essilor, and Danone got involved with this new economic model through their social action groups, describes the ingenious new financial tools now funding social businesses, and sketches the legal and regulatory changes needed to jumpstart the next wave of socially driven innovations. He invites young people, mainly between the ages of 12 to 35, business and political leaders, and ordinary citizens, to join the three-zero movement to help create the better world we all dream of, free from climate change, poverty, and unemployment.

“The growth of the people is more important than the economy's growth,” emphasized Professor Yunus. He stressed the urgency to redesign our approach to economic emancipation. He recommends “Be a job giver rather than a job seeker” to unleash creativity and empower individuals for society's good. His wisdom dictates the need to see the quality of life of all people, particularly the improvement of the bottom 10% of society. He opined that this bottom 10% reflects society's quality of life, not the top 10%. On entrepreneurship, he advises to “tell the children they have two options: they can work for someone else or be on their own to be what they want to be.”

Despite the clarion call to eradicate poverty by 2030, Poverty persists in every country. Research shows that in 2024, over 8% of the world's population lives in extreme poverty. Various charitable organizations request that all, primarily the well-to-do, lend a voice and act in the fight against extreme poverty. What appears peculiar in the international initiative to fight against poverty is that the acceptance of the Islamic formula to eradicate poverty is still unwelcome in most of the post-modern society championed by the so-called Western world. More strange is the matter of the Muslim-majority countries' reluctance to accept the Islamic magic formula to eradicate poverty and social vices.

To remind the readers, this year's celebration of Poverty Eradication Day theme is “Ending Social and Institutional Maltreatment Acting Together for Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies.” Historically, the Islamic formula outsmarts the briefly mentioned above ideas and initiatives by a distance of a thousand years. The prescription doesn't only include human rights but also animal rights in 7th-century Arabia, where, unparalleled to human history, a load on a camelback was defined as not hurting or harming the animal. Thus, if one reflects on this year's theme unbiasedly, one can vividly understand that the Islamic prescription manifested in just

governance and perpetual peace, creating a sustainable, prosperous, inclusive, plural society and eradicating poverty and all other social injustices, vices, and depravity. The first ever Islamic state of Madinah, also known as the State of Madinah, was established in 622 CE under the Constitution of Madinah. Its charter-the constitution remains an ageless testament that it was not an ideal idea scribbled on paper but implemented justly, addressing the needs of the just governance in a plural society, which, in a short period of 32 years, defended its sovereignty by defeating the then two of the super powers-the Eastern Byzantines and the Sassanid Persia.

Islam asserts that poverty is one of the calamities that Allah has decreed to happen, perhaps as a test or trial, either to a specific person, a family, or a society. Poverty adversely affects people's beliefs and conduct, hence a test or trial. Islamic methodology to fight poverty teaches people that provision comes from Allah, the Sole Provider. They are to seek refuge with Allah from poverty. They are to work and earn an honest living. They are to make zakat obligatory for the rich. Islamic Sharia (Islamic way of life) encourages us to give charity, set up waqfs (charitable endowment held in trust), and sponsor orphans and widows. It also prohibits riba (Usury and Interest), gambling, and deceit in commerce and encourages helping the needy and supporting the weak. Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, tells us that some of the pre-Islamic Arabs used to kill their children, either because of the poverty in which they were living or for fear of poverty that might befall them. Allah says of the first case: "...kill not your children because of poverty — We provide sustenance for you and them." [Qur'an: Al-An'am, 6:151]. And He says of the second case: "And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them as well as for you. Surely, the killing of them is a great sin." [Qur'an: Al-Isra', 17:31].

Given the limited scope of this article, if only zakat is briefly discussed, it can be seen that Islam makes zakat obligatory for the wealth of the rich. Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, has granted the poor a share of zakat as their right, which is to be given to the poor to survive and sustain and is to be given until they become independent of means and are no longer poor. Allah says: "As-Sadaqat (here it means Zakat) are only for the Fuqara' (poor), and Al-Masakin (the needy) and those employed to collect (the funds); and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam), and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah's Cause, and for the wayfarer (a traveler who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise." [Qur'an: At-Tawbah, 9:60]. Implementing the zakat system, the entire Arabian Peninsula enjoyed economic and political security by the end of the Prophet's (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) period. This system reached its pinnacle during Khalifa 'Umar's period (Michael Hart, A Ranking of The Most Influential Persons in History, pages 261-265), when, history tells us, hardly anyone needed charity.

As enlightened as they are, Hobbes and Jefferson, perhaps, couldn't overcome the bias to accept the Islamic complete code of life as a 'Talisman,' a 'silver bullet,' a 'practical prescription'

that provides an outstanding social contract formula for attaining booming societal prosperity, the perpetual peace, and sustainable poverty alleviation. As for Professor Dr. Yunus, his enthusiastic initiative to eradicate poverty in the world, particularly in Bangladesh through Grameen Bank since 1976, and of late, his new idea of establishing a 'Three Zero Club' for young people is contributing. Now, he is in the driving seat of a successful 'Bangla Basanta,' a trendy leader of about 92% Muslim population and a harbinger of communal harmony. While observing this year's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in Bangladesh and to do justice to our 36th July revolution, can we not expect him to emulate the example of the 7th century Madinah or demonstrate the leadership of Khalifa 'Umar or at least 8th century 'Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz, famously known as the second 'Umar, as a just ruler, and fine-tune his noble ideas, as they did, with the Islamic Just Principles to bring sustained prosperity to the nation we dearly call Bangladesh?

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***The article was published in [The Asian Age](#) newspaper on 17 October 2024***