

Book Review: SDG 18: Spirituality, Values and Culture for Humanizing Sustainable Development - (ISTAC-IIUM Publications)

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On the occasion of the launch of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM) book publication: “SDG 18: Spirituality, Values and Culture for Humanizing Sustainable Development - A Future Worldview, ed. Abdelaziz Berghout and Khaliq Ahmad, 2023” — I am pleased to answer the editors’ request to write an article in way of a review. I was pleased when I was approached, a couple of years ago, to contribute a chapter to this book, which I did under the title, “Maqasid and Ethics of Sustainability: An Integrated Framework for Development”. I believe that a Muslim addition of “Spirituality, Values and Culture” as an 18th goal to the SDGs is an important contribution that fills a major gap in the original SDG vision.

The current global crisis that humanity is witnessing challenges us on every goal of the SDG goals, especially given the genocide and war crimes in Palestine. What Palestine has revealed about the world we live in forces us to think in new ways. It is becoming clearer that the proposed SDG 18 —from an Islamic point of view— is crucial. It is not only an “amendment” or a “cultural sensitivity”. It is a necessity and it is particularly necessary to define the proposed “Spirituality, Values and Culture” from an Islamic point of view for all humanity.

The ideals of the United Nations’ SDGs (No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life On Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Partnerships for the Goals) - do have similarity to the Islamic ethical ideals and even the goals of the Islamic jurisprudence (maqasid al-shariah) in a basic way. However, it is now clear that the very definitions of these goals are going to be misguided and thrown off the track of Truth, if they continue to be subject to the hegemony of the current national and international systems that govern our world the way they govern our world.

The current crisis shows that all people could say the same above slogans and use the same words. However, humanity is now in the process of a clear division between those who understand and interpret these slogans in a way that is truthful and genuine, versus those who are committing or assisting to commit

every crime that goes against these slogans, while at the same time offering lip-service to them. For true Muslims, the judge between these two parties is the truths of Islam. This is how I understand an “SDG 18” as an Islamic contribution.

The Islamic truths will allow us to answer these questions correctly and rectify the current injustices. When we say “No Poverty” or “Zero Hunger” or “Responsible Consumption”, do we mean “humanitarian aid” of the kind we see entering Gaza today or the way most governments in this world have been dealing with the poor, the hungry and the homeless? Or do we mean enforcing economic limits on the rich and breaking the monopoly of the One-Percent over the decisions in the monetary systems, the war industry and the media? When we say “Equality” between men and women, do we mean pushing women deeper into the service of the current systems of “economic growth”? Or do we mean for the decent men in this world to force the other men to carry their responsibilities towards women on all levels, from the family to the highest levels of legislation? When we say “Life Below Water and Life On Land”, do we consider these creations “communities like us” as the Quran teaches? Or do we merely look at our illusive “economic benefits” from “preserving” their species? When we say “Peace and Justice”, are we labelling freedom fighters versus terrorists correctly? Are we sincerely abiding by some agreed-upon “international law”? Or are these words just for consumption in election seasons while political representation and good governance is fading away?

These are quick examples on how the Islamic Truths could inform, or rather save, the United Nations “Global Goals”. Actually, the Islamic Truths, which are human truths in their own rights, have the potential to save the United Nations themselves and restore the dream of a peaceful world where a “World War” would never happen again. This is especially significant as World War III looms closer these days!

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