

Climate Change and Global Warming: An Islamic Perspective

Allah, the Exalted states in the Glorious Quran:

“And to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And We have instructed those who were given the Scripture before you and yourselves to fear Allah. But if you disbelieve - then to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And ever is Allah Free of need and Praiseworthy.” (4:131)

The above Quranic verse, among others, gives us a clear picture of what is generally understood as the primary basis of an Islamic world view: the idea of “Tauhid”, or the oneness of Allah/God Almighty. In this “Tauhidic” world view the entire universe (all of existence) is seen as originating from Allah, returning to Him, and centered around Him. It is a world created and sustained by Allah with a purpose, and a design. As this entire universe is a product of His divine wish, it is a universe unfolding with a divine purpose. The reference point, the center of all things is Allah. From Him we have come, we owe our continued existence to Him and to Him we shall finally return. (See: <http://www.islamfrominside.com/Pages/Articles/Ecology%20Environment%20and%20Islam.html>)

However, before we proceed from these premises to define man’s role and duty vis-à-vis our environment and ecosystems, it may be worthwhile to first of all shed a little light on what climate change and global warming are all about. What have experts in the field said? After answering these questions, I will then go on to further elucidate Islam’s position on the issue and hence man’s responsibility based on the “Tauhidic” world view.

Climate Change:

The Department of Ecology: State of Washington, USA on its website

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange/whatis.htm#Q1> states among other things that *“climate includes patterns of temperature, precipitation, humidity, wind and seasons. “Climate change” affects more than just a change in the weather; it refers to seasonal changes over a long period of time. These climate patterns play a fundamental role in shaping natural ecosystems, and the human economies and cultures that depend on them.*

Because so many systems are tied to climate, a change in climate can affect many related aspects of where and how people, plants and animals live, such as food production, availability and use of water, and health risks.

For example, a change in the usual timing of rains or temperatures can affect when plants bloom and set fruit, when insects hatch or when streams are their fullest. This can affect historically synchronized pollination of crops, food for migrating birds, spawning of fish, water supplies for drinking and irrigation, forest health, and more.”

Global Warming

On global warming the same source states, "Global warming" refers to rising global temperatures, while "climate change" includes other more specific kinds of changes. Warmer global temperatures in the atmosphere and oceans leads to climate changes affecting rainfall patterns, storms and droughts, growing seasons, humidity, and sea level.

Even though a warming trend is global, different areas around the world will experience different specific changes in their climates, which will have unique impacts on their local plants, animals and people. A few areas might even get cooler rather than warmer."

Why is climate change a concern?

On why climate change is such a serious concern to the world the Washington State Dept. of Ecology states, "In 2007, scientists from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted that warming oceans and melting glaciers due to global warming and climate change could cause sea levels to rise 7-23 inches by the year 2100. Worldwide, densely populated coastal communities and infrastructure that supports them would be affected (such as city buildings and homes, roads, ports and wastewater treatment plants). Some would be flooded or more vulnerable to storm damage. In flat terrain, the shoreline could move many miles inland.

Other effects are also serious. In some places, floods and/or drought could become more frequent and more severe. Even seemingly less dramatic local changes in temperature, precipitation and soil moisture could severely impact many things important to human life and all life around us, including:

- natural ecosystems
- agriculture and food supplies
- human health
- forestry
- water resources and availability
- energy use
- transportation

Many people are concerned that we are losing time to make a difference. Climate change and its effects may be irreversible. Life could become very difficult for some populations—plant, animal and human. Species, cultures, resources and many lives could be lost."

What causes climate change and global warming?

"This question has been debated a lot, because climate change can be "due to natural variability or as a result of human activity" (IPCC 2007) and because the climate system is very complex.

There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming over the last 50 years is due to human activities. Ice cores taken from deep in ancient ice of Antarctica show that carbon dioxide levels are higher now than at any time in the past 650,000 years. More carbon dioxide in the atmosphere means warming temperatures. In its 2007 report to the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that it is more than 90 percent likely that the accelerated warming of the past 50-60 years is due to human contributions.

These contributions include increased levels of "heat-trapping" gases (a.k.a. "greenhouse gases") such as carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere. One of the biggest ways people contribute to greenhouse gases is by burning fossil fuels. We use coal, oil, and natural gas to generate electricity, heat our homes, power our factories, and run our cars.

Changing land use patterns contribute, too. Trees and other plants use carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. When trees are cut down for development, agriculture, and other purposes, they're no longer available to take carbon dioxide out of the air, and actually release carbon dioxide as they decay or burn.

As the levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases increase, more heat is "trapped" and global temperatures rise. This causes significant changes in the timing and length of the seasons as well as the amount and frequency of precipitation. (IPCC 2007)" (ibid)

Islam's Position

It is thus clear from the above that the drastic changes we have seen in our environments during the past few decades and what we continue to see and live of the increasing adverse effects of climate change and global warming are and have been most often than not a direct result of man's abuse of nature. It is all the outcome of man's greed; the human being's insatiable lust for the enjoyment of the comforts of life even at the cost of destroying his own habitat and thus himself.

In the Quran however, when Allah intended to create man He announced it to His angels saying:

"And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

And He taught Adam the names - of all things. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful."

They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise."

He said, "O Adam, inform them of their names." And when he had informed them of their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed." (Q. 2:30-33)

Man has thus been placed on earth to be the representative of Allah/God Almighty and as such has been endowed with knowledge even above that of the angels. Man with that knowledge is commanded to fear Allah, his Creator and the Creator of the universe.

The names of all things which Allah taught Adam obviously included most of all, the nature and forms of all things material in our universe which have been made subservient to man (Q. 31:20). The fear of Allah therefore, entails complete consciousness of the Divine Being, the love of Him, fear of His retribution and hope in His mercy. The Muslim, in order to realize this and be a true Believer, must submit totally, consciously and willingly to the will of His Lord, Creator and Cherisher. This is the person who will cultivate in themselves, inner peace and thence easily be at peace with their fellow creatures and environment. Inner peace in essence is nothing less than being one in purpose with the Creator.

However from the very beginning Allah had warned mankind against an enemy so ferocious in his assault, deceptive in his ways and extremely cunning in design. This enemy is none other than our arch rival himself: "Iblees" or Satan as he is generally known. Having fallen from grace and expelled from the mercy of the Guardian Lord as a result of his jealousy of man, arrogance and disobedience to the Creator (Q. 2:34); Iblees vowed to misguide Adam and his offspring. Allah quoted him in the Quran as having said among other things:

"And I will mislead them, and I will arouse in them [sinful] desires, and I will command them so they will slit the ears of cattle, and I will command them so they will change the creation of Allah..." (Q. 4:119)

Satan thus takes makes use of every opportunity conceivable or not to hit back at human beings through our own weaknesses: lower desires and passions, our inner cravings for material possessions, domination, greed as well as our uncontrolled yearnings for the satisfaction of carnal desires.

Allah however, still warns and admonishes man not to follow in the footsteps of Satan.

"...and do not spend wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful."(Q. 17:26-27)

Yet despite these clear divine directives and admonitions man's contentiousness has not gone unnoticed. In Sura 2, Verse 204 to 206 Allah tells the Prophet (*peace be upon him*):

"And of the people is he whose speech pleases you in worldly life, and he calls Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents. And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption. And when it is said to him, "Fear Allah," pride in the sin takes hold of him. Sufficient for him is Hellfire, and how wretched is the resting place."

Man therefore is a representative of Allah/God Almighty. Man is a steward and a trustee entrusted with the responsibility to establish and maintain justice and peace on earth (Q. 33:72). Man in short must serve his Creator by taking good care of what the Creator has entrusted him with which includes himself, other live forms and the environment. Man's failure to properly observe this function of trusteeship could very well lead to dire consequences in this life and the Hereafter as the final sentence of the above Quranic verse indicates. His doing well on the other hand, would only lead to the approval of the Almighty, eternal bliss and happiness.

The Messenger of Allah (*peace be upon him*) has declared:

"Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you shall be answerable for that which they have been made to guard"

Thus, like a just ruler over his subjects man, given dominion over nature in honour of his theomorphic make up must treat his environment with justice and compassion. A number of

fundamental factors broadly outlined in this paper necessitate and direct this relationship. These factors sum up the world view of Islam as outlined above:

1. Tauhid: the oneness of God/Allah. He is thus the originator, centre, controller and point of return of all.
2. Man's dominion over nature as a result of his theomorphic make up.
3. An unshakable belief in eschatology. Thus man's accountability before his Lord.

In this view, abuse of nature/the environment is tantamount to abuse/disobedience /disbelief of Allah/God Almighty. Parvez Manzoor in "Touch of Midas" asks these fundamental questions that call for serious consideration and action.

"Can we...check this threat to our planet simply by introducing stricter legislation against pollution, industrial waste and nuclear spill? Can we reverse the degradation of our environment by adopting conservationist policies on both national and international levels? Or could it be that the whole ecological imbalance betokens the spiritual and teleological crisis of modern civilization itself? Does it require fundamental revision of our own way of life, our cherished goals, indeed our very conception of ourselves and the world?"

In this Manzoor is only reflecting and echoing the very fundamental questions of life and existence that Allah puts to us in "Surat Ar-Rahman"- The Most Merciful. The first few "Aayaat"- Verses of this Sura read:

***"The Most Merciful
Taught the Qur'an,
Created man,
[And] taught him eloquence.
The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation,
And the stars and trees prostrate.
And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance
That you not transgress within the balance.
And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.
And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.
Therein is fruit and palm trees having sheaths [of dates]
And grain having husks and scented plants.
So which of the favours of your Lord would you deny?"(Q. 55:1-13)***

Indeed, Oh ungrateful man, which of the favours of your Lord would you deny? The balance which man is commanded not to disturb in the context of the above "Aayaat" is to be understood perhaps above all as the ecological balance our Creator has placed in the universe for our continued survival, safety, peace and harmony.

Justice must therefore be the watchword: social justice, legal and penal justice, political justice....and ...yes indeed climate justice. Justice brings peace which is the very essence of Islam. Paradise is the Home of Peace and Allah is Peace.

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