Muslim Community of Albania

Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqipërisë
AN ISLAMIC AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ON INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND TOLERANCE IN ALBANIA
The inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue today, more than ever has become a global necessity. The process of inter-religious dialogue is not mentioned at the same time to be a process of Christianity, Islamism, or Judaism, rather it is a continuous communication among nations, cultures, and traditions.
The religious tolerance in Islam

- Qur’an – the Holy Book and Sunna – Prophet Muhammad’s Tradition, are the main sources of Islam and both of them in their codes and principles, explain clearly the issue of tolerance and religious freedom.
The tolerance in Qur’an

Initially we will state a Qur’anic verse, which is a fundamental principle of Islam faith and the most magnificent provision in which the full religious freedom is stressed:

“There is no violence in religion” (Al-Baqarah, 256).

“And say: ‘The Truth from your Lord’. Then whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve” (Al-Kahf, 29).
The Qur’an warn Muslims to be tolerant, merciful, generous and conversable with the other religions members:

“If your Lord had so willed, and who are on the earth would surely have believed, all of them. Would you then, force people until they become believers?” (Jonah, 99).
In Islam Jewish and Christians are called “Ahlu Qitab” – people of Book.

“O People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and associate none as partner with Him, and that none of us take others for Lords, apart from God” (The Family of Imran, 64).
The tolerance in Muhammad prophetic tradition

- In a letter that Prophet sent to Najran Jews and Christians he wrote:

  “Najran and its neighborhood, have guaranteed from God and His Prophet, Muhammad— their wealth, their Churches and everything they have in propriety”.
When a delegation of Christians of Najran went to Medina and there had long discussions with the Prophet in the mosque, at a certain moment during the meeting, Christians sought a break to perform their religious rites. Muhammad understood their concerns and invited them to perform their religious rite (the Mass) in mosque, in one of the holiest shrines of Islam. So, this release of their own sanctuary for prayer, is an example of tolerance, patience and understanding, which in the future would become an Islamic behavior norm.
Prophet Muhammad responded to the invitations of “People of the Book”; he took part in their gatherings by eating together with them, because according to the Holy Qur’an, other than Muslims, is allowed to eat meat that is slaughtered in name of God, only from Christians and Jews, i.e. from monotheist people and not from polytheists.
Examples of tolerance throughout history
Relationships among Islam and Christianity

- During the period of Caliph Umar, while was conquering the city of Humus, ¼ of the local Church was used as a Mosque by local people consent, in order to pray the Muslims. So, Christians and Muslims entered from the same door. Whereas in Andalusia, the St. Vincent Church, after a mutual agreement was used, half as a Church and half as a Mosque. Meanwhile at Istanbul, we see that in the same yard are placed the Church, the Mosque and the Sinagogue.
Islam, through Spain Andalusia, would introduced in Europe, and later we have the introduction of Islam in Balkans in general and among Albanians in particular, which would occur gradually and by small steps.
History shows us that in the middle of X-th century, the chief of Hebraic community of Cordoba was appointed as the Caliphate “Prime Minister”; meanwhile a Christian bishop was as the “Foreign Minister.”
EID PRAYER IN TIRANA
A historical overview on interfaith understanding among Albanians

- Religious communities in Albania:
  - Muslims
  - Orthodox
  - Catholic
  - Jewish
  - Protestant
During the first half of XIX century, in several regions was very common that the same space, the same building, was used on Sundays as a church, and in other days as a mosque.
In 1856 a Sultan decree declared:

“Because of Durres Catholics don’t have a chapel and because they asked me to build a church, I give the permission for it, to be built in a suitable place, because this is my desire, so all citizens will enjoy a complete tranquility. I order not to do any prohibition of drawback to them and not to take any money from them.”

In other decree sent to the priest and Qadi’of Delvina, it is prohibited to tax the church properties in Delvina. In a 1849 decree, Sultan ordered the construction of Elbasan’ church, and in 1850 the construction of the Great Cathedral in Shkodra.
On April 7, 1858 at the inauguration of the Great Chatedral construction, participated Daut Borici Efendi, a Muslim clergyman and director of education in Shkodra, who delivered his speech, calling the construction of the cathedral, a great joy for all Shkodra’s inhabitants, regardless of religion.
In the old bazaar of Shkodra, one of the main trading day was the Sunday. Since Sunday was a day of rest and religious rituals for Christians, the city elders decided to pose Sunday as a major trading day and such days were scheduled on Wednesday and Saturday.
The reopening of the first church and the first mosque in November 1990, after stopping for nearly a quarter century, was an expression of interfaith harmony and brotherhood in front of the communist regime which was still in power. There collaborated young Catholic and Muslim boys both at church and mosque.
If we look at history, it was ILO Mitkë Qafëzezi, a Christian man, who published the first excerpts of the Quran in Albanian language, entitled "Chanting".
In his speech held in 1937, on the occasion of the first president of the Muslim Community of Albania, Haxhi Vehbi Dibra funeral, Monsignor Vissarionoti, president of the Albanian Orthodox Church, expressed the highest possible evaluation that an orthodox leader made ever to a Muslim leader, and as he himself said, this may be the only and unique case in the world, especially for that time, when a high priest holding a speech at the funeral of a Muslim leader.
Hafiz Dërguti who was sentenced by communists would express: “They want testimony from me, then to say that the priests were killed from our testimonies. But I said to them, kill me, but do not expect something like that from me.”

In the same cell and burial would end the Durresi Mufti Mustafa Varoshi and the Archbishop Vinçens Prendushi. Many clergymen of different faiths became a model of tolerance in the notorious prisons of monist system.
Joint activities of religious communities
In this way the coexistence and interfaith harmony among Albanians has been going on for centuries; now it has come to us through many vicissitudes as a great national value of a small nation. But this rare value, we must anywhere conserve, cultivate and promote in every way, through education, media, etc., both domestically and internationally.
“Albania was the one occupied country that evaded the Nazi persecution of Jews and had the unique survival rate of 100%. It was the only occupied country to have a larger Jewish population after the Second World War than before.” writes Harvey Sarner in his book “Rescue in Albania”.

“At first, individual Albanians saved Jews on their own initiative. Later, when it became more dangerous, the task was organized by National Liberation Councils in the towns and villages. There were cases where Jewish families, in great danger of discovery, were moved from family to family and village to village, from town to country and back again. Sometimes Jewish families traveled with false passports given to them by Albanians. Often Jews were disguised as Albanian peasants and covertly relocated. In the process, many Albanians were arrested and shot to death for their heroic activities.”
BESA
MUSLIMS WHO SAVED JEWS IN WORLD WAR II

Norman H. Gershman

Muslims Save Jews in Untold WWII Story
Exhibit showcases photographs of Albanian Muslims who sheltered Jews during the Holocaust
VATRA 100 VJEN JE SHÉRBIM TË KOMBIT

Celebrating 100 Years
A MUSLIM CAN NOT BE A TERRORIST,
A TERRORIST CAN NOT BE A MUSLIM...
"In True Islam, Terror does not Exist."
"Those who are happy about their opponent's defeat in debate have no mercy." He explains the reason for this: "You gain nothing by defeating someone. If you are defeated and the other person is victorious, then you would have corrected one of your mistakes."

THE SAINTS HAVE TRIED TO GATHER TOGETHER THE UNDISCIPLINED AND REBELLIOUS SOULS, SPREAD ALL OVER LIKE LOOSE PAGES; THEY HAVE USED LOVE TO TRY TO INTRODUCE HUMANE BEHAVIOR TO OTHERS.”
Muslim Community of Albania

Thank you!

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