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Call for prayers replaced by sounds of war

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BOOKS, television programmes and magazine articles all give lengthy explanations about the significance of the month of Ramadan in the Muslim calendar.

For Muslims in Malaysia, as it is elsewhere, it is about fasting from dawn to dusk, to break fast after maghrib prayers, and then to perform the special terawih prayers.

Compared to the Ramadan of our childhood or during our student days, the month we experience now is so very different.

Now that we are parents and approaching middle-age, we are more aware that all around the world there is war, there is poverty, there is great unhappiness and despair, and there is the continual "This land is mine, not yours," conflict between Israel and Palestine, which means yet more civilians are killed - both Palestinians and Israelis.

Surfing through the television channels, I caught a fleeting glimpse of King Abdullah of Jordan and heard one statement he made. King Abdullah (yes, I am taking this out of context) said: "There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim."

I may be truly off the mark here, but I took that statement to mean that either we are Muslims or we are not - it is as simple as that.

We define ourselves as Muslims in the way we conduct ourselves and in the way we obey Islam's tenets and teachings.

The niyyah (vow) within our hearts will determine our sincerity in being good Muslims.

When I was a student in London during the 1970s, my shopping trips were often cut short by announcements for shoppers to evacuate the area I was in.

Later, we would find out it had been a bomb scare.

On other days, in other parts of London, there would be other bomb scares except they were real bombs which blew up streets and buildings, and injured civilians.

"The Provisional and Official IRA decided to intensify their campaigns after British Prime Minister Edward Heath decided to impose direct rule from Westminster."

The IRA was using armed resistance against the military and political occupation of Ireland, and this included terrorist tactics.

"The Provisional IRA detonated at least 22 bombs in Belfast city centre ...1972 became the bloodiest year of The Troubles."

([http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/northern\\_ireland/understanding/events/bloody\\_friday.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/northern_ireland/understanding/events/bloody_friday.stm)).

And yet, even though most of the time the IRA admitted responsibility for the bombings, no newscaster nor newspaper called them "Christian extremists", "Catholics extremists" or "Christian terrorists".

Nowadays, Muslims the world over have already been labelled cruel as a direct consequence of the terrorist attacks that have occurred mainly in Palestine and Iraq, which have all been preceded by the events of Sept 11.

Newspapers mockingly, it seems, refer to Islam as a religion of peace.

A political journalist for The Straits Times of Singapore - who bears a Muslim name - analysed Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's apparently erroneous description of a Jewish-controlled world in his OIC speech and reminded us that, centuries ago, when the Jews were persecuted by the Christians, it was the Muslims who saved them and gave them shelter. Actually, that is

something we know only too well.

Consider the fact that in Jerusalem lies the Dome of the Rock, or what the Jews refer to as Temple Mount, a holy site for both Jews and Muslims, and nearby, the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Consider, too, why Muslims are angered by the way Israelis are encroaching upon Palestinian land because of what happened in history: "When the Muslims became the rulers of Jerusalem some matters became easier for the Jews. Other accounts indicate that Jews were employed in the Mosque area and that Jewish craftsmen made lamps for the Mosque." (<http://www.templemount.org/>).

What this journalist omitted to note is that, simply put, things have changed drastically since Sept 11, 2001; it has been Muslims who were, and are, still being persecuted, not the Jews nor the Christians.

Muslims have been vilified and condemned for our faith, even though we know that to commit suicide is a great sin.

The Hadith states that: "He who killed himself with steel (weapon) would be the eternal denizen of the Fire of Hell and he would have that weapon in his hand and would be thrusting that in his stomach for ever and ever." (Sahih Muslim, Book 001, No.0199) and also:

"He who killed himself with a thing would be tormented on the Day of Resurrection with that very thing." (Sahih Muslim, Book 001, No.0201)

This year, from the first day of Ramadan, cities in Iraq have been shaken by bombings transparently aimed at the Americans and the foreigners who are still there.

It did not seem to matter if those killed were the workers of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent who make up the ICRC, local policemen or innocent citizens.

Do Muslims condone this violence? No.

It is not for us to decide who must die.

Most of us are horrified that innocent people have been killed.

The Quran clearly says:

"And surely it is We, Who give life and cause death." (Al-Hijr Chapter, verse 23, The Holy Quran)

Not many of us agree with the American attack on Iraq, which caused the death of so many innocent Iraqis. Despite this, I, for one, understand how American parents, wives, husbands, and children would prefer to have their family members safe at home with them.

Death affects us all, whatever faith we belong to.

Ramadan, being the most blessed month in the Muslim calendar is a time for us to offer even more kindness, charity and goodwill to others than at other times of the year.

Orphans are to be feted, given food and made happy. The poor are likewise to be fed and looked after.

One of the many reasons that we fast is for us to realise what it is like for the poor to go without food and water, and thus to be thankful that we have both.

In a violence-ridden Iraq, I wonder how many orphans have food and water? How many of the poor remain hungry? More than anything, how many Iraqi citizens have family meals at the breaking of fast, without having to endure the sounds of bombs, missiles, and, worst of all, the screams of those injured or dying?

It may be Ramadan, the month when the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and it should be a time of peace.

But, instead, it is a time of great unhappiness and despair for Muslims, who live in the very same region of the world where all of God's prophets went to spread His word.

For Iraqis, perhaps the saddest thing is to hear the muezzin's call to

prayers drowned out by the sound of gunfire, missiles and bombs.  
The call for prayers has been replaced by the sounds of war.