GLOBAL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR IMAMS, SCHOLARS, RELIGIOUS TEACHERS AND DU'ĀT

GLOBAL
IMAMS & SCHOLARS
COUNCIL

A Framework of Ethical Guidance and Professional Principles for Religious Leaders Worldwide



In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

"*Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and He forbids immorality, wrongdoing and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.*" *(Qur'an 16:90)*

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Foreword

Islamic religious leadership is among the greatest trusts bestowed upon human beings. Those who undertake the roles of Imam, scholar (*ʿālim*), female scholar (*ʿālimah*), religious teacher, preacher (*dāʿiyah*), chaplain, spiritual mentor, and pastoral caregiver occupy positions that carry immense responsibility before Allah, before their communities, and before humanity.

Throughout Islamic history, religious leaders have served not merely as ritual functionaries or educators, but as custodians of faith, guardians of morality, transmitters of sacred knowledge, protectors of the vulnerable, mediators of conflict, advocates for justice, and servants of the common good. Their conduct, character, scholarship, and service have shaped the spiritual, intellectual, and social development of Muslim societies across the world.

In the contemporary era, Muslim religious leaders serve communities that exist within diverse legal, political, cultural, and social contexts. They face challenges and responsibilities that previous generations could scarcely have imagined, including rapid social change, global communication networks, digital technologies, mental health crises, safeguarding obligations, pluralistic societies, and increasingly complex ethical questions.

This Code of Conduct has been developed by the Global Imams and Scholars Council as a framework of ethical guidance and professional principles for religious leaders worldwide. It seeks neither to replace the sacred sources of Islam nor the established scholarly traditions and institutions through which Islamic knowledge has been preserved and transmitted. Rather, it seeks to articulate and consolidate the ethical principles, moral virtues, professional standards, and spiritual responsibilities that have always characterised authentic Islamic religious leadership.

This Code recognises the diversity of Muslim communities and legal systems throughout the world. It is therefore intended as a principles-based framework that may be adopted and adapted by institutions, communities, and scholars according to their local circumstances, legal obligations, and recognised scholarly traditions.

The ultimate purpose of religious leadership remains unchanged: to worship Allah, to guide humanity towards truth and goodness, to preserve the trust of religion, and to seek the pleasure of Allah through service to His creation.

Preamble

Islamic religious leadership is founded upon the principle of *amānah* — sacred trust.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> *"Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; yet mankind undertook it." (Qur'an 33:72)*

The offices of Imam, scholar, religious teacher, preacher, chaplain, counsellor, and spiritual guide are not merely professions, occupations, or social roles. They are trusts entrusted by Allah requiring knowledge, sincerity, wisdom, justice, compassion, humility, and accountability.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> "*Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock.*"

Religious leaders bear responsibility not only for the knowledge they convey, but also for the manner in which they embody the teachings they profess. Their conduct serves as an example to their communities and frequently shapes the public perception of Islam itself.

The trust of religious leadership therefore requires:

- sincerity in intention;
- excellence in action;
- integrity in conduct;
- justice in judgement;
- mercy in dealing with others;
- wisdom in guidance;
- accountability in leadership;
- humility in service.

This trust extends beyond ritual and worship to encompass all aspects of human life, including spiritual wellbeing, family life, education, community development, social welfare, justice, safeguarding, public ethics, and service to humanity.

Accordingly, those who undertake religious leadership should strive to fulfil their responsibilities in a manner that reflects the highest standards of Islamic character and conduct.

The Islamic Conception of Human Flourishing

Islam defines human wellbeing, success, and flourishing from a perspective that differs fundamentally from many contemporary secular conceptions of human fulfilment.

While many modern ethical and professional frameworks seek wellbeing primarily within the confines of worldly existence, Islam understands human flourishing through a broader and more comprehensive paradigm that encompasses both worldly welfare and eternal salvation.

The believer is taught to seek goodness in both worlds:

> "*Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and protect us from the punishment of the Fire.*" *(Qur'an 2:201)*

The concepts of wellbeing, happiness, fulfilment, self-realisation, success, and human dignity are therefore inseparable from the relationship between the human being and his or her Creator. Human beings are not merely autonomous individuals pursuing subjective preferences, but moral agents endowed with reason, conscience, and free will, who have been entrusted with responsibilities and who remain accountable before Allah.

The Qur'an teaches that human beings are created upon an innate disposition (*fiṭrah*) inclined towards truth and goodness. This innate nature requires preservation, cultivation, and guidance through faith, education, family, and community. Society itself bears responsibility for creating conditions that enable individuals to flourish spiritually, morally, intellectually, socially, and materially.

Human beings possess reason and freedom of choice, yet they also bear accountability for how these gifts are exercised. Allah states:

> "*We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.*" *(Qur'an 76:3)*

And He states:

> "*By the soul and He who fashioned it and inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness, successful indeed is the one who purifies it, and failed indeed is the one who corrupts it.*" *(Qur'an 91:7-10)*

Religious leadership therefore seeks not merely to alleviate worldly suffering or facilitate personal fulfilment, but to assist individuals and communities in achieving holistic wellbeing rooted in faith, moral integrity, and obedience to Allah.

Islamic Ethics and Contemporary Moral Frameworks

Muslims today live and operate within diverse social, legal, political, educational, and professional environments that are often shaped by secular ethical and moral frameworks. In many areas, these frameworks overlap with Islamic values, particularly in their concern for justice, human dignity, compassion, welfare, and the protection of the vulnerable.

However, there is an increasing tendency within some contemporary Muslim discourses to conflate prevailing social, cultural, political, or professional norms with Islamic ethical authority itself. While overlap undoubtedly exists, Islamic ethics derive their authority not from social consensus, political ideology, cultural trends, or subjective individual preference, but from divine revelation, prophetic guidance, and the cumulative scholarly tradition of Islam.

This distinction should not be understood as suggesting an inherent opposition between Islamic and contemporary ethical frameworks. Rather, it reflects the Islamic understanding that ultimate moral authority rests with Allah and that human reason operates within the framework of divine guidance.

Examples of areas in which tensions may arise include questions relating to:

- the nature of human flourishing and wellbeing;
- personal autonomy and moral responsibility;
- family structure and kinship;
- sexuality and gender;
- bioethics and medical ethics;
- concepts of rights and obligations;
- religious authority and personal identity;
- the relationship between individual freedom and communal responsibility.

Religious leaders are therefore called to engage contemporary ethical frameworks critically, constructively, and confidently, drawing upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the objectives of the Sharīʿah, and the recognised scholarly traditions of Islam.

The role of religious leadership is neither to reject contemporary society wholesale nor to surrender Islamic principles to prevailing social trends. Rather, it is to embody and articulate the ethical vision of Islam with wisdom, compassion, confidence, and fidelity to revelation.

The Higher Objectives of the Sharīʿah

The scholars of Islam, upon examining the totality of the revealed law, recognised that the divine guidance of Islam seeks to establish mercy, justice, wisdom, and human flourishing through the preservation of certain essential

human interests.

These objectives, commonly referred to as the *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*, constitute a foundational ethical framework for Islamic religious leadership.

They include:

The preservation of faith and spiritual wellbeing (Hifẓ al-Dīn)

Every human being possesses the right to know, worship, and draw near to Allah. Religious leaders bear responsibility for protecting and nurturing faith, spirituality, religious practice, and moral formation.

The preservation of life, health, and physical welfare (Hifẓ al-Nafs)

Islam seeks the protection of human life, safety, health, and wellbeing. Religious leaders must therefore work to protect individuals and communities from harm, abuse, neglect, and oppression.

The preservation of intellect and knowledge (Hifẓ al-ʿAql)

The pursuit of knowledge, education, wisdom, and intellectual development is a central objective of Islam. Religious leaders should promote learning, critical thought, education, and sound judgement.

The preservation of family and social relations (Hifẓ al-Nasl)

Islam recognises the importance of family, kinship, community, and social cohesion. Religious leaders should seek to strengthen family life, protect children, and preserve healthy social relationships.

The preservation of dignity, honour, and human worth (Hifẓ al-ʿIrḍ)

Every human being possesses inherent dignity bestowed by Allah. Religious leaders must protect honour, reputation, privacy, and human dignity.

The preservation of wealth and material wellbeing (Hifẓ al-Māl)

Islam seeks economic justice, lawful provision, financial security, and the protection of property and resources. Religious leaders should promote financial integrity, social welfare, and justice.

These objectives provide the ethical framework through which religious leaders seek to promote justice, prevent harm, establish mercy, and fulfil their responsibilities towards Allah and His creation.

Purpose and Scope of This Code

This Code of Conduct establishes a framework of ethical principles, professional standards, and spiritual responsibilities for Imams, scholars, female scholars, religious teachers, du'āt, chaplains, counsellors, and others who occupy positions of religious leadership and trust.

It seeks to:

- preserve the integrity and honour of religious leadership;
- promote excellence and professionalism;
- strengthen public confidence and trust;
- protect vulnerable individuals and communities;
- support religious leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities;
- encourage accountability, transparency, and good governance;
- promote justice, mercy, wisdom, and service to humanity.

This Code is intended to serve as a principles-based framework capable of adaptation according to local legal systems, institutional structures, cultural contexts, and

recognised schools and traditions of orthodox Islam.

Its ultimate purpose is to assist religious leaders in fulfilling the trust entrusted to them by Allah, while serving humanity with sincerity, excellence, wisdom, and compassion.

PART I

Ethics, Character and Values

1. Religious Leadership as Moral and Spiritual Example

Those who occupy positions of religious leadership serve not merely as teachers of Islam, but as representatives of its moral, spiritual, and ethical teachings. The Imam, scholar, religious teacher, female scholar, preacher, chaplain, and spiritual guide occupy positions of public trust and moral responsibility. Their conduct, character, and behaviour inevitably influence the individuals and communities whom they serve.

Allah, the Most High, describes the Muslim community as:

> "*Thus We have made you a justly balanced community so that you may be witnesses over mankind.*" *(Qur'an 2:143)*

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was described by Allah as possessing:

> "*Indeed, you are upon an exalted standard of character.*" *(Qur'an 68:4)*

Religious leaders therefore bear a particular responsibility to embody the values, virtues, and ethical teachings that they seek to transmit. Their role extends beyond the delivery of sermons, lessons, legal opinions, or spiritual advice; it encompasses the cultivation of trust, the preservation of dignity, and the demonstration of Islamic ethics through personal example.

The office of religious leadership should not be understood merely as a profession, occupation, or means of social status. Rather, it is a trust (*amānah*) and a responsibility (*taklīf*) entrusted by Allah and exercised in service to His creation.

The conduct of religious leaders should therefore reflect the highest standards of Islamic character and ethical conduct.

2. Iḥsān: The Principle of Excellence

The foundational ethical principle underlying all religious leadership is *iḥsān* — excellence, beauty, and perfection in worship, conduct, and service.

The Prophet ﷺ defined *iḥsān* by saying:

> "*That you worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then know that He sees you.*"

He ﷺ also said:

> "*Indeed Allah has prescribed excellence (iḥsān) in all things.*"

The principle of *iḥsān* requires religious leaders to strive continually towards excellence in all aspects of their work, character, worship, and relationships. It requires the pursuit of quality, sincerity, competence, compassion, and beauty in all that

is undertaken.

The religious leader should therefore strive to:

- worship Allah with sincerity and devotion;
- serve others with compassion and excellence;
- pursue knowledge with humility and diligence;
- discharge responsibilities faithfully and competently;
- maintain the highest standards of personal conduct;
- seek continual improvement in character and service.

The pursuit of *iḥsān* recognises that perfection belongs to Allah alone, while excellence remains the lifelong aspiration of every believer.

3. Truthfulness and Sincerity

Truthfulness (*ṣidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) constitute the foundation of religious leadership.

Allah says:

> "*O you who believe, fear Allah and be with those who are truthful.*" *(Qur'an 9:119)*

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

> "*Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. A person continues to speak the truth and strive for truthfulness until he is recorded with Allah as a truthful person.*"

Religious leaders should constantly strive to remain truthful to the responsibilities entrusted to them and guard themselves against the temptations associated with religious authority, including:

- love of status;
- desire for fame;
- pursuit of wealth;
- pursuit of influence;
- personal ambition;
- sectarian loyalty;
- political expediency;
- seeking the approval of others at the expense of truth.

The religious leader should continually remind himself or herself that religious leadership is not a means of personal advancement but a responsibility and a trust.

Likewise, sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) requires that all acts of worship, teaching, preaching, leadership, and service be undertaken seeking the pleasure of Allah alone.

Religious leaders should therefore strive:

- to purify their intentions continually;
- to avoid ostentation and self-promotion;
- to seek divine pleasure rather than worldly recognition;
- to maintain consistency between public conduct and private conduct;
- to fulfil their responsibilities regardless of personal gain or loss;
- to uphold truth and justice even when doing so is difficult.

The preservation of sincerity requires continual self-reflection, repentance, spiritual discipline, and accountability.

4. Excellence in Professional and Religious Practice

Religious leadership requires not only good intentions, but also competence, diligence, and professional excellence.

Allah says:

> "*Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence.*" *(Qur'an 16:90)*

The pursuit of excellence requires religious leaders to strive continually to improve the quality of their knowledge, service, conduct, and institutional practice.

This includes:

Excellence in Knowledge

Religious leaders should pursue sound knowledge continuously and maintain awareness of developments relevant to their fields of service and expertise.

Excellence in Service

Religious leaders should seek to provide the highest quality of religious, educational, spiritual, and pastoral care possible within their circumstances and capabilities.

Excellence in Institutional Practice

Religious leaders should work collaboratively with colleagues, institutions, scholars, professionals, and community organisations to improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided.

Excellence in Administration

Religious leaders should maintain appropriate records, procedures, and standards of organisation to ensure accountability, continuity, and transparency.

Excellence in Safeguarding

Religious leaders should establish and maintain safeguarding systems that protect individuals, preserve dignity, and promote public trust.

Excellence in Self-Care

Religious leaders should recognise that their own spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing directly affects the quality of their service to others.

The pursuit of excellence requires continual reflection, evaluation, learning, and improvement.

5. Exemplary Character

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> "*I was sent only to perfect noble character.*"

The ethical and spiritual authority of religious leadership derives not merely from knowledge or position, but from character.

Religious leaders should therefore strive to embody the prophetic virtues of:

- truthfulness;
- sincerity;
- justice;
- mercy;
- patience;
- humility;
- courage;
- compassion;
- wisdom;
- generosity;
- dignity;
- forgiveness;
- gentleness;
- trustworthiness.

Exemplary character is demonstrated through:

Respect for Human Dignity

Every individual should be treated with dignity, compassion, fairness, and respect regardless of their social status, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, or background.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

Religious leaders should protect the confidentiality, dignity, and privacy of all those whom they serve.

Humility

Religious leaders should avoid arrogance, self-importance, and excessive attachment to authority or status.

Patience and Compassion

Religious leadership frequently requires patience, empathy, and understanding, particularly when dealing with individuals experiencing hardship, vulnerability, or distress.

Justice and Fairness

Religious leaders should seek to act fairly and impartially in all their dealings and avoid favouritism, prejudice, or discrimination.

Accountability

Religious leaders should recognise their own fallibility and remain open to advice, correction, consultation, and accountability.

6. Integrity

Integrity is among the most important qualities required of those who occupy positions of religious leadership.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "*The truthful and trustworthy person will be with the Prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs.*"

Integrity requires consistency between belief, speech, conduct, and intention.

Religious leaders should therefore:

- adopt the ethical manners and etiquettes taught by Islam;
- maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct;
- conduct themselves honestly and transparently;
- accurately represent their qualifications and experience;
- fulfil their legal and ethical obligations;
- avoid deception and misrepresentation;
- avoid conduct that undermines public confidence;
- maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries;
- preserve the dignity and honour of religious office.

Integrity also requires the courage to admit mistakes, seek forgiveness, and rectify wrongdoing.

7. Core Islamic Values

Allah says:

> "*Among those whom We created is a community who guide by truth and establish justice thereby.*" *(Qur'an 7:181)*

The values through which religious leaders make decisions should be derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the objectives of the Sharīʿah, and the recognised scholarly traditions of Islam.

These values should be understood and applied with due regard for time, place, context, and circumstance.

Among the foundational values of Islamic religious leadership are:

Justice (ʿAdl)

Allah says:

> "*O you who believe, stand firmly for justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your relatives.*" *(Qur'an 4:135)*

Justice requires fairness, impartiality, courage, and the defence of those who are oppressed or vulnerable.

Balance (Wasatiyyah)

Islam calls for moderation, balance, and avoidance of excess in belief, conduct, and judgement.

Humility (Tawāḍuʿ)

Religious leadership should be characterised by humility before Allah and humility in service to others.

Protection of the Vulnerable

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "*You are given provision and victory only because of your weak and vulnerable people.*"

The protection of children, women, the poor, the elderly, refugees, minorities, and all vulnerable persons is a religious obligation.

Equality and Human Dignity

All human beings possess dignity bestowed upon them by Allah and deserve to be treated with justice and respect.

Honesty (Ṣidq)

Truthfulness remains a fundamental requirement of all religious leadership.

Service (Khidmah)

Religious leadership is fundamentally an act of service to Allah through service to humanity.

8. Examples of Islamic Values in Practice

The ethical teachings of Islam require religious leaders to demonstrate these values through action as well as belief.

This includes:

- standing firmly for justice even when personally disadvantageous;
- defending the oppressed regardless of background or affiliation;
- protecting orphans, widows, and vulnerable persons;
- avoiding exploitation and financial injustice;
- preserving communal unity and social harmony;
- avoiding envy, hatred, and malice;
- rejecting deception and dishonesty;
- refusing to cooperate in wrongdoing and oppression;
- cooperating in righteousness and piety;
- exercising justice in all dealings;
- avoiding extravagance and excess;
- protecting those who seek protection;
- avoiding vanity, arrogance, and ostentation;
- demonstrating generosity, compassion, and mercy;
- responding to those in need with dignity and kindness.

Allah says:

> "*Cooperate with one another in righteousness and piety, and do not cooperate in sin and aggression.*" *(Qur'an 5:2)*

The ultimate purpose of these values is the cultivation of individuals and communities characterised by faith, justice, mercy, wisdom, and excellence, seeking the pleasure of Allah through service to His creation.

The religious leader should therefore strive continually to cultivate these virtues within himself or herself before seeking to cultivate them in others.

PART II

Knowledge, Scholarship and Professional Competence

1. The Obligation of Knowledge

Knowledge (*ʿilm*) occupies a central and honoured position within Islam. The first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began with the command to read and seek knowledge, establishing scholarship, education, and intellectual development as foundational principles of Islamic civilisation.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> "*Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*" *(Qur'an 39:9)*

And He states:

> "*Allah will raise those who believe among you and those who have been given knowledge by degrees.*" *(Qur'an 58:11)*

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

> "*Whoever travels a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise.*"

The positions of Imam, scholar, religious teacher, female scholar, chaplain, counsellor, and dāʿiyah are therefore founded upon the pursuit, preservation, transmission, and application of knowledge.

Religious leaders should recognise that the authority to teach, guide, advise, issue religious opinions, or exercise spiritual leadership derives not merely from personal experience, popularity, charisma, or institutional position, but from sound knowledge, recognised scholarship, wisdom, and integrity.

Religious leadership should therefore be exercised with humility, recognising that knowledge is both a blessing and a responsibility for which one will ultimately be accountable before Allah.

2. The Pursuit of Excellence in Religious Scholarship

It is incumbent upon religious leaders to strive for competence and excellence in the areas of knowledge relevant to their roles and responsibilities.

The precise requirements will vary according to the nature of the position occupied, local circumstances, institutional expectations, and the needs of the communities served. Nevertheless, all religious leaders should possess sufficient knowledge, training, and competence to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to them.

Areas of competence may include, but are not limited to:

The Qur'an and Its Sciences

Religious leaders should possess an appropriate understanding of the Qur'an, including its recitation, interpretation, objectives, ethical teachings, and application.

Those whose roles require recitation or instruction should strive for excellence in Qur'anic recitation and the preservation of its proper transmission.

The Prophetic Sunnah and Hadith

Religious leaders should possess a sound understanding of the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, the sciences of hadith, and the principles governing the interpretation and application of prophetic traditions.

Islamic Jurisprudence and Legal Methodology

Those who provide religious guidance, legal opinions, pastoral advice, or educational instruction should possess an appropriate understanding of:

- Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*);
- legal methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*);
- legal maxims (*qawāʿid fiqhiyyah*);
- the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*);
- the principles governing legal disagreement (*ikhtilāf*);
- the role of custom, context, necessity, and public welfare.

Religious leaders should recognise the diversity of legitimate scholarly opinions within the recognised traditions of Sunni Islam and exercise caution, humility, and wisdom when issuing legal opinions.

Theology and Creed

Religious leaders should possess a sound understanding of Islamic beliefs, theology, and creed according to the recognised scholarly traditions of orthodox Islam.

Spirituality and Character Development

Religious leaders should cultivate knowledge of Islamic spirituality, ethics, purification of the soul, and character development, recognising that religious leadership requires not only intellectual competence but also spiritual maturity.

3. Language and Communication

Effective religious leadership requires the ability to communicate knowledge clearly, compassionately, and appropriately.

Religious leaders should therefore seek competence in:

- the language of their local communities;
- the language of religious scholarship where relevant;
- public speaking and communication skills;
- teaching and educational methodologies;
- written communication;
- pastoral communication.

Knowledge that cannot be effectively communicated may fail to benefit those whom it is intended to serve.

The ability to communicate religious teachings with wisdom, clarity, and compassion was among the distinguishing characteristics of the Prophets and scholars throughout Islamic history.

4. Teaching and Educational Competence

Teaching is among the greatest responsibilities entrusted to religious leaders.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> "*Indeed, I was sent as a teacher.*"

Religious leaders should therefore seek to develop the skills necessary to educate effectively across diverse educational settings and age groups.

This includes:

- understanding effective teaching methodologies;
- recognising differences in learning abilities and styles;
- teaching children appropriately and safely;
- teaching adults respectfully and effectively;
- adapting educational approaches to local contexts;
- encouraging critical reflection and intellectual development;
- promoting sound understanding rather than mere memorisation;
- fostering love of faith, worship, and good character.

Educational excellence requires continual reflection, adaptation, and professional development.

5. Counselling, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Guidance

In many communities, religious leaders function not only as teachers and scholars but also as counsellors, mediators, mentors, chaplains, and providers of spiritual care.

Religious leaders should recognise both the importance and the limitations of their pastoral role.

Those who provide counselling, mediation, pastoral care, or spiritual guidance should seek appropriate training and competence in areas such as:

- active listening;
- pastoral care;
- family mediation;
- conflict resolution;
- counselling skills;
- trauma awareness;
- grief and bereavement support;
- crisis intervention;
- safeguarding;
- referral procedures.

Religious leaders should exercise particular care when dealing with individuals experiencing emotional distress, family conflict, trauma, abuse, addiction, bereavement, or psychological illness.

Pastoral care should be characterised by:

- compassion;
- wisdom;
- confidentiality;
- patience;
- respect for human dignity;
- recognition of professional limitations;
- commitment to the welfare of those seeking assistance.

The religious leader should seek to facilitate healing, reconciliation, spiritual growth, and wellbeing while recognising that many circumstances require specialist intervention.

6. Mental Health Awareness and Professional Collaboration

Mental health and emotional wellbeing represent important aspects of human welfare recognised by the Islamic tradition.

Throughout Islamic history, scholars, physicians, and spiritual teachers recognised the interconnected nature of spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and physical wellbeing.

Religious leaders should therefore seek to develop awareness and understanding of:

- common mental health conditions;
- trauma and its effects;
- depression and anxiety disorders;
- family and relationship difficulties;
- substance misuse and addiction;
- grief and bereavement;
- crisis intervention;
- suicide prevention;
- safeguarding concerns.

Religious leaders should avoid reducing all psychological distress to exclusively spiritual causes or assuming competence in areas requiring professional expertise.

Where necessary, religious leaders should work collaboratively with:

- healthcare professionals;
- mental health practitioners;
- counsellors;
- psychologists;
- social workers;
- safeguarding professionals;
- legal professionals;
- educational institutions;
- community support organisations.

Seeking professional assistance should not be viewed as a deficiency of faith but as part of the Islamic obligation to pursue benefit and prevent harm.

7. Cultural Competence and Contextual Awareness

Religious leaders increasingly serve diverse communities composed of individuals from various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, social, and national backgrounds.

Effective religious leadership therefore requires sensitivity to context and awareness of cultural diversity.

Religious leaders should seek to develop understanding of:

- local customs and practices;
- cultural diversity within Muslim communities;
- local legal frameworks;
- social and political contexts;
- historical realities affecting their communities;
- interfaith environments;
- demographic and generational differences;
- contemporary social challenges.

At the same time, religious leaders should distinguish between:

- immutable religious principles;
- legitimate cultural diversity;
- customary practices;
- local conventions;
- social trends.

This distinction requires wisdom, scholarship, humility, and contextual understanding.

8. Administrative and Institutional Competence

Religious leadership increasingly requires competence in areas extending beyond traditional scholarship and teaching.

Religious leaders should therefore seek to develop appropriate skills in:

- administration;
- organisational leadership;
- governance;
- record keeping;
- safeguarding procedures;
- financial accountability;
- strategic planning;
- project management;
- community engagement;

- institutional development.

The effective functioning of religious institutions requires both spiritual leadership and sound administration.

The Prophet ﷺ himself demonstrated the importance of organisation, consultation, planning, and administration in the establishment of the first Muslim community.

9. Lifelong Learning and Continuing Professional Development

The pursuit of knowledge does not end with graduation, ordination, certification, or appointment.

Religious leaders should recognise that they remain lifelong students of knowledge and that continual learning constitutes a religious and professional obligation.

This includes:

- pursuing advanced study;
- attending educational programmes and conferences;
- participating in scholarly circles;
- engaging in peer learning;
- maintaining awareness of contemporary developments;
- developing professional competencies;
- seeking mentorship and supervision;
- engaging with emerging ethical questions and social challenges.

Institutions should actively support and facilitate the continued educational and professional development of religious leaders.

The pursuit of knowledge requires humility, discipline, and the recognition that no individual possesses complete knowledge.

10. Recognising the Limits of One's Knowledge and Expertise

Among the greatest signs of scholarship is the recognition of one's own limitations.

The early scholars considered the statement "I do not know" to be among the greatest signs of knowledge and sincerity.

Religious leaders should therefore:

- recognise the limits of their expertise;
- avoid speaking without knowledge;
- avoid issuing religious opinions outside their competence;
- seek consultation when uncertain;
- refer individuals to appropriate specialists where necessary;
- avoid the temptation to present themselves as experts in all matters.

Allah states:

> "*Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.*" *(Qur'an 17:36)*

And He states:

> "*Ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.*" *(Qur'an 16:43)*

Recognising one's limitations is not a sign of weakness or deficiency. Rather, it is an expression of honesty, humility, wisdom, and fear of Allah.

Religious leaders should therefore strive continually to balance confidence with humility, scholarship with caution, and authority with accountability.

11. The Ethics of Religious Authority

Religious authority carries profound ethical responsibilities.

The scholar, Imam, teacher, or preacher should never exploit religious authority for personal gain, social influence, political advantage, or institutional control.

Religious authority should instead be exercised:

- with humility rather than arrogance;
- with service rather than domination;
- with compassion rather than harshness;
- with wisdom rather than impulsiveness;
- with justice rather than favouritism;
- with sincerity rather than self-interest.

The greater the authority entrusted to an individual, the greater the responsibility and accountability that accompanies it.

The religious leader should therefore continually remember that all authority ultimately belongs to Allah and that every trust entrusted to human beings will ultimately be subject to divine accountability.

The pursuit of knowledge and the exercise of religious leadership should thus remain acts of worship, service, humility, and devotion to Allah.

PART III

Professional Boundaries, Safeguarding and Public Trust

1. Public Trust and the Sacred Responsibility of Religious Leadership

The effectiveness and legitimacy of religious leadership depend fundamentally upon trust. Communities entrust their religious leaders with their faith, families, children, personal struggles, confidential information, spiritual wellbeing, and communal institutions. This trust constitutes one of the greatest responsibilities borne by those who occupy positions of religious authority.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> "*Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people, to judge with justice.*" *(Qur'an 4:58)*

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

> "*There is no faith for the one who is not trustworthy.*"

Religious leaders occupy positions of authority that are inherently unequal. Individuals often approach Imams, scholars, teachers, female scholars, counsellors, and duʿāt during times of vulnerability, grief, uncertainty, emotional distress, spiritual crisis, or personal hardship.

Religious leaders must therefore exercise their authority with humility, caution, transparency, and accountability, recognising that the abuse of religious authority constitutes not merely professional misconduct but a betrayal of a sacred trust.

The preservation of public trust requires the maintenance of clear professional boundaries, robust safeguarding practices, personal integrity, institutional accountability, and an unwavering commitment to justice and the protection of the vulnerable.

2. Conflict of Interest

Islam places great emphasis upon avoiding circumstances that compromise justice, impartiality, or public trust.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ warned against the misuse of public office and authority when he addressed a collector of charity who had accepted personal gifts while undertaking his official duties. The Prophet ﷺ publicly reminded the community that positions of trust must never be used for personal enrichment or advantage.

Religious leaders should therefore exercise particular caution in situations where personal interests, family relationships, financial considerations, emotional attachments, or institutional loyalties may conflict with their professional or religious responsibilities.

Conflicts of interest may arise in numerous situations, including:

- financial transactions;
- employment decisions;
- marriage proposals;
- counselling relationships;
- institutional appointments;
- family disputes;
- inheritance matters;
- charitable distributions;
- business relationships;
- political activities.

Religious leaders should seek to avoid circumstances that create actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest.

Where conflicts of interest cannot reasonably be avoided, they should be disclosed openly and managed transparently through consultation, supervision, and institutional oversight.

The preservation of public confidence requires not only the avoidance of wrongdoing but also the avoidance of circumstances that reasonably give rise to suspicion, mistrust, or misunderstanding.

3. Abuse of Religious Authority

Religious authority should never be used to manipulate, exploit, intimidate, coerce, or control others.

The spiritual influence exercised by religious leaders creates particular vulnerabilities that require heightened ethical responsibility.

Religious leaders should never:

- exploit emotional vulnerability;
- misuse confidential information;
- manipulate individuals through claims of spiritual authority;
- coerce individuals into financial arrangements;
- abuse pastoral relationships;
- exploit family difficulties or marital disputes;
- use religious status for personal advantage;
- misuse religious texts to justify misconduct;
- pressure individuals into decisions against their free will.

Particular caution should be exercised whenever individuals seek guidance during periods of grief, trauma, family breakdown, mental illness, spiritual crisis, financial hardship, or emotional vulnerability.

Religious authority exists to serve, protect, educate, and guide, not to dominate or control.

4. Professional Relationships and Boundaries

The relationship between a religious leader and those whom he or she serves is a professional, spiritual, educational, and pastoral relationship founded upon trust and responsibility.

Religious leaders should therefore maintain clear and appropriate professional boundaries in all interactions.

These boundaries exist:

- to protect those receiving services;
- to protect religious leaders themselves;
- to preserve institutional trust;
- to prevent abuse or exploitation;
- to promote accountability and transparency.

Professional boundaries should be maintained in:

- educational relationships;
- counselling relationships;
- pastoral relationships;
- supervisory relationships;
- financial relationships;
- social relationships;

- digital communications;
- institutional relationships.

Religious leaders should recognise that familiarity, emotional dependency, or personal attachment can compromise objectivity, judgement, and professional responsibility.

The maintenance of appropriate boundaries is an expression of integrity, wisdom, and respect for the sacred trust of religious leadership.

5. Marriage, Personal Relationships and Religious Authority

Particular care should be exercised regarding marriage proposals, emotional relationships, and personal attachments arising from religious or pastoral relationships.

Religious leaders should avoid initiating or pursuing personal, romantic, or marital relationships with individuals over whom they exercise religious, educational, pastoral, supervisory, or counselling authority.

Such relationships may involve:

- unequal power dynamics;
- emotional dependency;
- perceived coercion;
- compromised consent;
- conflicts of interest;
- damage to institutional trust.

Religious leaders should therefore exercise extreme caution and seek appropriate consultation, supervision, and transparency whenever circumstances arise that could create actual or perceived impropriety.

Similarly, religious leaders should avoid conducting, facilitating, or encouraging secretive, concealed, or deceptive marital arrangements that undermine transparency, safeguarding, family rights, legal obligations, or public trust.

The application of Islamic legal opinions regarding marriage should always consider:

- context;
- local law;
- public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*);
- prevention of harm (*dafʿ al-mafsadah*);
- safeguarding;
- family rights;
- the objectives of the Sharīʿah.

The preservation of faith, dignity, family stability, and public trust should remain paramount considerations.

6. Gender Interactions and Professional Conduct

Islam establishes principles of modesty, dignity, respect, and appropriate interaction between men and women.

Religious leaders should therefore conduct themselves in accordance with the recognised principles of Islamic etiquette, modesty, and professional conduct while recognising the diversity of legitimate scholarly opinions and cultural contexts.

Interactions between men and women in professional, educational, pastoral, and institutional settings should be characterised by:

- dignity;
- modesty;
- transparency;
- professionalism;
- respect;
- accountability.

Religious leaders should avoid circumstances that:

- create suspicion;
- compromise professional judgement;
- expose individuals to harm;

- undermine public confidence;
- create opportunities for exploitation or misconduct.

Private meetings, counselling sessions, pastoral interactions, and educational encounters should be conducted in ways that promote safety, accountability, and transparency while preserving dignity and confidentiality.

Institutions should establish clear procedures and safeguards governing interactions between religious leaders and those whom they serve.

7. Female Religious Scholars, Teachers and Duʿāt

Women have played an essential role in the transmission, preservation, teaching, and development of Islamic knowledge throughout Islamic history.

Female scholars, teachers, preachers, spiritual guides, and educators bear the same obligations of sincerity, scholarship, integrity, safeguarding, accountability, and service that apply to all religious leaders.

Female religious leaders should strive to embody:

- sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*);
- excellence (*iḥsān*);
- dignity (*waqār*);
- modesty (*ḥayā'*);
- upright character (*murū'ah*);
- professional integrity.

Female religious leaders should seek to:

- maintain high standards of scholarship and competence;
- observe recognised Islamic principles of modesty and presentation (*satr*);
- preserve appropriate professional boundaries;
- uphold safeguarding obligations;
- maintain confidentiality;
- pursue continual learning and development;
- serve as role models of faith, scholarship, and service.

Institutions should recognise the vital role played by female scholars and educators and should actively support their education, professional development, wellbeing, and participation in religious leadership.

The historical contribution of women to Islamic scholarship and civilisation should be acknowledged, preserved, and strengthened.

8. Safeguarding Women and Vulnerable Persons

Religious leaders should exercise heightened awareness and caution when interacting with individuals who may be vulnerable due to personal, social, emotional, economic, or psychological circumstances.

Particular care should be exercised in pastoral relationships involving:

- women experiencing abuse or family breakdown;
- individuals experiencing emotional distress;
- victims of trauma;
- refugees and displaced persons;
- converts to Islam;
- individuals experiencing social isolation;
- persons with disabilities;
- those experiencing financial hardship.

Institutions should establish clear safeguarding procedures designed to:

- protect vulnerable individuals;
- protect religious leaders from false accusations;
- promote transparency and accountability;

- preserve trust and confidence.

Such measures may include:

- appropriate supervision;
- professional record keeping;
- institutional oversight;
- transparent communication channels;
- safeguarding training;
- referral procedures;
- risk assessment protocols.

Safeguarding measures should seek to balance privacy and confidentiality with accountability and protection from harm.

9. Safeguarding Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The protection of children, young people, and vulnerable adults constitutes a fundamental religious and moral obligation.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrated extraordinary care, compassion, and gentleness towards children and vulnerable individuals throughout his life.

Religious leaders and institutions should therefore ensure that:

- safeguarding policies are established and maintained;
- legal safeguarding obligations are fulfilled;
- appropriate background checks are undertaken where applicable;
- safeguarding training is completed and regularly updated;
- reporting procedures are clearly established;
- staff and volunteers receive appropriate supervision;
- educational environments remain safe and secure;
- allegations of abuse are addressed promptly and appropriately.

Religious leaders should recognise that safeguarding responsibilities extend to:

- physical safety;
- emotional wellbeing;
- psychological welfare;
- spiritual welfare;
- protection from exploitation;
- protection from neglect;
- protection from abuse.

The protection of vulnerable individuals should always take precedence over concerns regarding institutional reputation, personal relationships, or communal sensitivities.

10. Confidentiality and Privacy

Individuals frequently disclose deeply personal information to religious leaders in circumstances of trust and vulnerability.

The preservation of confidentiality constitutes an ethical, religious, and professional obligation.

Religious leaders should therefore:

- protect confidential information;
- preserve personal privacy;
- maintain secure records;
- avoid unnecessary disclosure;
- exercise discretion and wisdom;
- explain the limits of confidentiality where necessary.

However, confidentiality is not absolute.

Disclosure may become necessary where there exists:

- risk of serious harm;
- abuse or neglect;
- safeguarding concerns;
- legal obligations;
- threats to life or safety;
- significant public interest concerns.

Religious leaders should seek guidance and consultation whenever uncertainty exists regarding the disclosure of confidential information.

The preservation of confidentiality should always be balanced against the obligation to prevent harm and protect the vulnerable.

11. Record Keeping and Documentation

Appropriate record keeping promotes accountability, continuity, safeguarding, and professional practice.

Where relevant to their role, religious leaders should maintain appropriate records relating to:

- counselling;
- safeguarding;
- referrals;
- institutional decisions;
- educational activities;
- financial matters;
- complaints procedures.

Records should be:

- accurate;
- proportionate;
- secure;
- confidential;
- lawful;
- professionally maintained.

The purpose of documentation is not surveillance or bureaucracy, but the protection of individuals, institutions, and religious leaders themselves.

12. Self-Care and Personal Wellbeing

Religious leadership can impose significant spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, and physical burdens.

Religious leaders frequently carry responsibility for the suffering, crises, disputes, and emotional burdens of entire communities.

The preservation of personal wellbeing should therefore be understood as a religious responsibility rather than a personal luxury.

Religious leaders should seek to maintain:

Spiritual Wellbeing

Through worship, remembrance of Allah, supplication, reflection, study, and spiritual companionship.

Physical Wellbeing

Through appropriate attention to health, nutrition, rest, and physical activity.

Psychological Wellbeing

Through emotional awareness, supervision, consultation, reflection, and professional support where necessary.

Family and Social Wellbeing

Through maintaining healthy relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and community.

Professional Wellbeing

Through establishing healthy boundaries, managing workload, pursuing development, and seeking support when needed.

The Prophet ﷺ himself taught the importance of balance, saying:

> "*Indeed, your body has a right over you, your family has a right over you, and your Lord has a right over you.*"

Religious leaders should therefore strive to maintain a healthy balance between worship, service, family life, learning, rest, and personal development.

13. Accountability Before Allah

Ultimately, all safeguarding measures, professional boundaries, institutional policies, and ethical codes derive their meaning from a deeper reality: accountability before Allah.

The religious leader should continually remember that:

- no action escapes divine knowledge;
- no trust remains without accountability;
- no position of authority exempts one from judgement;
- no public reputation can substitute for sincerity.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "*Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be questioned regarding those under your care.*"

The preservation of public trust therefore begins with private integrity, sincere worship, fear of Allah, and continual self-accountability.

It is through this consciousness of divine accountability that religious leadership remains an act of worship, service, mercy, and trust.

PART IV

Finance, Probity and Stewardship

1. Financial Integrity as a Religious Obligation

Financial integrity occupies a central place within the ethical framework of Islam. The preservation of wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*) is recognised by the scholars as one of the higher objectives of the Sharīʿah, and the ethical acquisition, management, and distribution of wealth constitute matters of both legal and spiritual significance.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> "*Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly.*" *(Qur'an 2:188)*

And He states:

> "*Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due.*" *(Qur'an 4:58)*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ repeatedly warned against financial dishonesty, exploitation, corruption, and the abuse of public trust. He taught that positions of authority constitute trusts rather than opportunities for personal enrichment.

Religious leaders therefore bear a particular responsibility to maintain the highest standards of financial integrity, transparency, accountability, and stewardship.

The Imam, scholar, religious teacher, female scholar, preacher, chaplain, and religious administrator should recognise that financial misconduct damages not only individuals and institutions but also public confidence in religion itself.

2. Financial Independence and Personal Integrity

Religious leaders are strongly encouraged to maintain financial independence and personal financial responsibility to the greatest extent possible.

The pursuit of religious leadership should not be motivated by financial gain, material ambition, social status, or personal enrichment.

At the same time, Islam recognises the legitimacy and dignity of lawful remuneration for religious service, teaching, leadership, and scholarship.

Religious leaders should therefore seek to:

- maintain lawful and transparent sources of income;
- avoid unnecessary financial dependency upon individuals within their communities;
- exercise moderation and responsibility in financial affairs;
- avoid financial arrangements that compromise independence or objectivity;
- preserve their personal dignity and professional integrity.

Financial dependence upon particular individuals, families, institutions, donors, or political actors may create actual or perceived conflicts of interest and should therefore be approached with caution.

The preservation of financial independence contributes to the preservation of intellectual independence, religious integrity, and public trust.

3. Gifts, Honoraria and Personal Benefits

The acceptance of gifts, honoraria, hospitality, and financial benefits has long been recognised within Islamic jurisprudence as an area requiring wisdom, caution, and ethical sensitivity.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned against the acceptance of gifts linked to public office and positions of trust, reminding believers that public responsibility should not become a means of personal enrichment.

Religious leaders should therefore exercise caution regarding:

- personal gifts;
- financial donations;
- honoraria;
- hospitality;
- sponsorship arrangements;
- travel benefits;
- institutional privileges;
- preferential treatment.

The acceptance of gifts or benefits may become ethically problematic where it:

- compromises impartiality;
- creates obligations or expectations;
- influences religious judgement;
- creates conflicts of interest;
- undermines public trust;
- results in actual or perceived favouritism.

Religious leaders should therefore seek transparency and institutional oversight in circumstances where gifts, payments, or benefits may give rise to concerns regarding propriety or independence.

Particular care should be exercised when individuals seeking religious guidance, counselling, legal opinions, or pastoral support offer gifts or financial incentives.

The preservation of trust and impartiality should remain paramount.

4. Fees for Religious Services

Throughout Islamic history, scholars have held differing opinions regarding remuneration for various forms of religious service.

Recognising this diversity of scholarly opinion, religious leaders should exercise wisdom, transparency, and integrity when receiving remuneration for religious services.

Where fees, honoraria, or payments are received for activities such as:

- teaching;
- lectures;
- conferences;
- educational programmes;
- counselling;
- mediation;
- chaplaincy;
- marriage services;
- consultancy;
- publication;
- advisory work;

such arrangements should be:

- transparent;
- lawful;
- institutionally accountable where appropriate;
- fair and proportionate;

- free from exploitation;
- clearly communicated.

Religious leaders should avoid exploiting the vulnerability, dependency, or religious devotion of those whom they serve.

The provision of essential religious services should never become a means of coercion, financial exploitation, or personal enrichment.

5. Institutional Responsibility and Fair Remuneration

Religious institutions bear significant responsibilities towards those entrusted with religious leadership.

The multifaceted role of the Imam, scholar, teacher, female scholar, chaplain, and religious leader often includes responsibilities relating to:

- worship;
- education;
- counselling;
- pastoral care;
- family mediation;
- community organisation;
- safeguarding;
- administration;
- public engagement;
- spiritual leadership;
- social welfare;
- institutional management.

These responsibilities frequently involve substantial emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical burdens.

Institutions should therefore strive to ensure that religious leaders receive:

- fair and dignified remuneration;
- safe working conditions;
- appropriate contractual protections;
- access to continuing professional development;
- adequate rest and leave;
- pastoral and psychological support;
- opportunities for career development;
- institutional protection and advocacy.

The fair treatment of religious leaders represents not merely a contractual obligation but an ethical and religious responsibility.

Failure to support religious leaders adequately may contribute to:

- financial hardship;
- burnout;
- instability;
- institutional dysfunction;
- compromised service provision;
- ethical vulnerability.

Communities and institutions should therefore recognise that investing in religious leadership constitutes an investment in communal wellbeing itself.

6. Financial Transparency and Accountability

Financial transparency represents an essential component of institutional integrity and public trust.

Religious leaders involved in financial management, fundraising, charitable administration, or institutional governance should ensure that financial affairs are conducted:

- honestly;
- transparently;
- accurately;
- responsibly;
- lawfully;
- accountably.

This includes:

- maintaining accurate records;
- ensuring proper authorisation procedures;
- avoiding conflicts of interest;
- implementing appropriate oversight mechanisms;
- complying with legal requirements;
- preserving institutional accountability.

Religious leaders should avoid:

- informal financial arrangements;
- undocumented transactions;
- misuse of charitable funds;
- unauthorised expenditure;
- personal use of institutional resources;
- concealment of financial interests.

The ethical management of wealth is itself an act of worship and stewardship.

7. Charitable Funds and Public Trust

Religious institutions frequently administer charitable donations and public funds entrusted by communities seeking the pleasure of Allah.

The administration of such resources requires heightened standards of integrity and accountability.

Those entrusted with charitable funds should seek to ensure:

- proper governance;
- financial transparency;
- accurate accounting;
- lawful expenditure;
- protection against fraud;
- responsible stewardship;
- fair distribution;
- compliance with legal and religious obligations.

Charitable resources should be used exclusively for their intended purposes and managed in ways that maximise public benefit and minimise waste.

Religious leaders should remember that every charitable donation represents both an act of worship by the donor and a trust entrusted to the institution.

8. Exploitation and Financial Abuse

Religious leaders should never exploit their position, authority, reputation, or spiritual influence for personal financial gain.

Financial exploitation may take many forms, including:

- soliciting personal gifts;
- pressuring individuals into donations;
- exploiting vulnerable persons;
- manipulating religious sentiments for financial benefit;
- coercive fundraising practices;
- misuse of charitable resources;
- undisclosed financial arrangements;
- exploiting dependency relationships;
- abusing positions of trust.

Particular care should be exercised when dealing with:

- elderly individuals;
- vulnerable persons;
- recent converts;
- individuals experiencing grief or crisis;
- those seeking spiritual healing;
- persons suffering financial hardship.

Religious authority should never be used to pressure, manipulate, or exploit those seeking guidance, assistance, or support.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "*Whoever deceives us is not from among us.*"

9. Financial Conflicts of Interest

Religious leaders should exercise particular caution where financial interests intersect with religious responsibilities.

Conflicts of interest may arise in matters involving:

- employment;
- family relationships;
- charitable distribution;
- institutional appointments;
- business arrangements;
- property transactions;
- investments;
- marriage arrangements;
- inheritance matters;
- consultancy services.

Where actual, perceived, or potential conflicts arise, religious leaders should seek to:

- disclose them transparently;
- seek independent advice;
- recuse themselves where appropriate;
- preserve fairness and impartiality;
- maintain public confidence.

The avoidance of suspicion and the preservation of trust remain important ethical principles in Islamic leadership.

10. Stewardship of Institutional Resources

Religious institutions, mosques, educational centres, charitable organisations, endowments (*awqāf*), and community resources represent collective trusts entrusted to the Muslim community.

Those entrusted with their management should recognise that they serve not as owners but as custodians and stewards.

Stewardship requires:

- responsibility;
- honesty;
- competence;
- transparency;
- consultation;
- accountability;
- strategic foresight.

Institutional resources should be managed in ways that:

- preserve long-term sustainability;
- maximise communal benefit;
- protect charitable intentions;
- avoid waste and extravagance;
- strengthen community welfare;
- promote justice and public good.

Allah, the Most High, says:

> "*Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils.*" *(Qur'an 17:27)*

The management of communal resources should therefore reflect prudence, wisdom, and accountability.

11. Poverty, Welfare and Social Responsibility

The ethical teachings of Islam require religious leaders to remain conscious of the social and economic realities faced by those whom they serve.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ consistently emphasised:

- care for the poor;
- support for widows and orphans;
- relief of hardship;
- feeding the hungry;
- social solidarity;
- economic justice.

Religious leaders should therefore strive to:

- advocate for social justice;
- support charitable initiatives;
- facilitate welfare provision;
- protect vulnerable individuals;
- encourage generosity;
- combat exploitation and poverty;
- strengthen communal solidarity.

Religious institutions should seek to serve not merely as places of worship but also as centres of social care, welfare, support, and communal wellbeing.

12. Accountability Before Allah in Matters of Wealth

Ultimately, all wealth, resources, authority, and property belong to Allah.

The religious leader should therefore continually remember that financial accountability extends beyond legal compliance, institutional oversight, and public scrutiny.

Allah states:

> "*Then you will surely be asked that Day about every blessing.*" *(Qur'an 102:8)*

The Prophet ﷺ taught that every individual will be questioned regarding:

- their wealth;
- how it was acquired;
- how it was spent;
- the trusts entrusted to them;
- the responsibilities they exercised.

The ethical management of wealth therefore represents an act of worship, stewardship, and accountability before Allah.

The religious leader should strive to ensure that financial conduct reflects sincerity, justice, integrity, moderation, and fear of Allah, recognising that the preservation of public trust and the pursuit of divine pleasure remain the ultimate objectives of all religious service.

PART V

Community Engagement, Social Responsibility and Public Life

1. The Role of Religious Leaders in Society

Religious leadership in Islam is not confined to ritual instruction or private spirituality. Rather, it is a public trust (*amānah*) that carries responsibility for the moral, social, educational, and spiritual wellbeing of communities.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described leadership as responsibility, stating:

> *"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock."*

Religious leaders therefore serve not only individuals who attend mosques, centres, or classes, but also the wider society in which Muslims live.

Their role includes nurturing faith, strengthening character, promoting justice, reducing harm, and contributing positively to the common good.

2. Engagement with the Wider Society

Muslim communities exist within diverse, plural societies that include people of different faiths, cultures, and worldviews. Religious leaders should therefore engage constructively with wider society in a manner that reflects Islamic values of justice, mercy, and good conduct.

This engagement includes contributing positively to civic life, cooperating in matters of shared public benefit, and addressing social challenges that affect all members of society.

At the same time, engagement should be grounded in Islamic principles and should not compromise core religious values or ethical boundaries.

Religious leaders should be both firmly rooted in their Islamic identity and responsibly engaged with the society around them.

3. Citizenship, Law and Civic Responsibility

Religious leaders should encourage respect for lawful order, civic responsibility, and constructive participation in public life.

Islamic teachings emphasise the importance of fulfilling contracts, respecting agreements, and maintaining justice within society.

Where Muslims live under legal frameworks that guarantee safety and freedom of worship, religious leaders should encourage compliance with the law, provided that such compliance does not require disobedience to clear and fundamental religious obligations.

Religious leaders should also encourage active citizenship, including:

- contributing to public wellbeing;
- participating in civic initiatives;
- supporting social cohesion;

- engaging with local institutions;
- promoting ethical responsibility in public life.

4. Women in Community Life and Religious Leadership

Women are an essential and integral part of the Muslim community and have historically contributed to every dimension of Islamic civilisation, including scholarship, teaching, leadership, welfare, and spiritual development.

The early Muslim community included women who were teachers, narrators of hadith, advisors, caregivers, scholars, and active participants in public life.

Religious leaders should therefore ensure that women are:

- fully included in community life;
- provided access to education and learning opportunities;
- given appropriate access to religious guidance and pastoral care;
- enabled to participate in institutional development;
- supported in leadership, teaching, and service roles where appropriate.

Mosques and Islamic institutions should strive to ensure that facilities and services for women are of equal dignity, accessibility, and quality.

This includes prayer spaces, educational programmes, pastoral services, and community engagement opportunities.

Women should not be treated as peripheral members of the community but as central contributors to its spiritual and social wellbeing.

5. Female Scholars, Teachers and Dāʿiyāt

Female religious educators and callers to Islam (*dāʿiyāt*) carry a vital responsibility in nurturing faith, providing guidance, and serving communities.

Their contribution should be recognised, supported, and institutionalised in ways that reflect both Islamic tradition and contemporary communal needs.

Female religious leaders should be enabled to:

- teach and educate across all appropriate contexts;
- deliver spiritual guidance and pastoral care;
- contribute to educational leadership;
- participate in institutional decision-making where relevant;
- develop scholarship and research;
- mentor and support younger generations.

Institutions should ensure that female religious leadership is not marginalised but integrated meaningfully into the structures of community life.

All religious leaders, regardless of gender, are bound by the same ethical principles of integrity, safeguarding, humility, and accountability.

6. Youth Engagement and Development

Young people represent the future of the Muslim community and require particular care, attention, and investment.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave special attention to the youth, nurturing their faith, character, and leadership potential.

Religious leaders should therefore prioritise:

- accessible youth education programmes;
- mentoring and spiritual development;

- leadership training;
- character development initiatives;
- safe recreational and learning environments;
- opportunities for meaningful participation in community life.

Youth should be treated not merely as recipients of guidance but as active participants in shaping the future of their communities.

Institutions should ensure that young people feel welcomed, valued, and supported within religious environments.

7. Children and Early Development

Children should be welcomed into religious spaces and nurtured in environments that promote faith, love of learning, and positive character development.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrated gentleness, patience, and affection towards children, recognising their importance within the community.

Religious institutions should therefore strive to create environments that are:

- safe;
- welcoming;
- nurturing;
- educational;
- supportive of families.

Parents should be supported in bringing children into religious spaces in ways that encourage inclusion without compromising safety or the rights of others.

Children should be taught with kindness, patience, and age-appropriate guidance, avoiding harshness or exclusion.

8. Community Cohesion and Social Harmony

Religious leaders should actively contribute to strengthening social cohesion within Muslim communities and in wider society.

This includes:

- reducing division and sectarian tension;
- promoting mutual respect;
- encouraging ethical disagreement;
- fostering unity on shared principles;
- discouraging hostility and extremism;
- promoting constructive dialogue.

Differences of opinion within Islamic scholarship are historically established and should be managed with respect, humility, and wisdom.

Religious leaders should avoid language or conduct that promotes unnecessary division or undermines communal harmony.

9. Interfaith Engagement and Dialogue

Religious leaders should engage with people of other faiths in a manner that reflects Islamic teachings of justice, respect, and peaceful coexistence.

Interfaith engagement may include:

- dialogue and cooperation;
- shared social initiatives;
- community service projects;
- educational exchanges;
- addressing common social challenges.

Such engagement should be conducted without compromising Islamic beliefs or practices, while maintaining respect and good conduct towards others.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> *"Do not argue with the People of the Book except in a way that is best." (Qur'an 29:46)*

10. Social Justice and Advocacy

Islam places strong emphasis on justice, fairness, and opposition to oppression.

Religious leaders therefore carry a responsibility to speak and act in support of justice, particularly when addressing:

- poverty and inequality;
- discrimination;
- violence and abuse;
- social exclusion;
- institutional injustice;
- humanitarian concerns.

Religious leaders should encourage constructive engagement with public policy and civic institutions, supporting what is beneficial and opposing what is harmful, while maintaining wisdom, legality, and responsibility.

Advocacy should be conducted in ways that promote reconciliation, understanding, and positive change rather than division or harm.

11. Engagement with Public Institutions

Religious leaders may engage with public institutions such as local authorities, educational bodies, healthcare services, and community organisations.

Such engagement should be characterised by:

- professionalism;
- transparency;
- cooperation in public benefit;
- adherence to Islamic ethical principles;
- respect for legal frameworks;
- constructive dialogue.

Religious institutions should seek to contribute positively to society while maintaining their religious identity and independence.

12. Language, Communication and Public Representation

Religious leaders should strive to communicate effectively within their social context.

This includes:

- clear communication in relevant local languages;
- respectful public discourse;
- responsible use of media and digital platforms;
- avoidance of inflammatory or harmful rhetoric;
- promoting understanding and clarity.

Religious leaders should recognise that their speech and conduct often represent Islam in the public sphere and should therefore exercise care, wisdom, and responsibility.

13. Concluding Principle: Service to Humanity

The overarching principle of community engagement in Islam is service to humanity.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was described as:

> *"A mercy to the worlds."*

Religious leadership should therefore be grounded in mercy, justice, compassion, and service.

Religious leaders should strive to benefit all people, protect the vulnerable, strengthen communities, and contribute to the wellbeing of society as a whole.

The ultimate objective is not only the preservation of religious identity, but the realisation of goodness, justice, and mercy in

all aspects of communal life.

PART VI

Accountability, Governance and Institutional Oversight

1. Accountability as an Islamic Principle

Accountability (*muḥāsabah*) is a foundational principle of Islamic ethics and governance. It applies to individuals, institutions, and communities alike.

The second Caliph, ʻUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him), said:

> *"Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable, and weigh your deeds before they are weighed."*

Religious leadership is not exempt from accountability; rather, it is among the most accountable forms of public responsibility due to its influence over faith, morality, and communal life.

Every Imam, scholar, teacher, female scholar, chaplain, and dāʿiyah should recognise that their actions are subject to:

- divine accountability before Allah;
- institutional accountability within their organisations;
- communal accountability before the people they serve.

2. The Need for Institutional Oversight

Effective religious leadership requires structured systems of oversight, support, evaluation, and accountability.

Institutions should therefore establish governance structures that ensure:

- ethical conduct;
- professional standards;
- safeguarding compliance;
- financial integrity;
- educational quality;
- pastoral responsibility;
- community trust.

Oversight is not intended as surveillance or control, but as a means of preserving integrity, supporting leaders, and protecting communities.

3. Advisory and Oversight Bodies

Religious institutions and wider networks of scholars and Imams should be supported by structured advisory and oversight bodies.

Such bodies may include representation from:

- senior scholars;
- experienced Imams;
- female scholars and educators;
- academics and subject specialists;
- community leaders;
- youth representatives where appropriate;
- professionals from relevant fields (e.g., safeguarding, education, mental health, law).

These bodies should aim to:

- uphold ethical and professional standards;
- provide guidance and consultation;
- review complex cases where necessary;
- support institutional decision-making;
- ensure consistency in safeguarding and ethics;
- offer mentorship and development opportunities;
- protect both communities and religious leaders from harm or misconduct.

The purpose of such structures is to ensure collective wisdom (*shūrā*), shared responsibility, and institutional integrity.

4. Independence, Integrity and Non-Partisanship

Religious oversight bodies and institutions should operate with independence from undue external influence.

Religious leadership should not be compromised by:

- political partisanship;
- financial pressure;
- ideological extremism;
- personal loyalties;
- external agendas that conflict with Islamic ethical principles.

The integrity of religious leadership requires that decisions be guided by:

- Islamic principles;
- justice;
- public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*);
- safeguarding obligations;
- scholarly integrity;
- community wellbeing.

Religious institutions should remain places of guidance and unity, not division or political instrumentalisation.

5. Evaluation and Professional Development

Accountability includes not only correction and oversight but also constructive development.

Religious leaders should be supported through:

- regular supervision and review;
- mentoring relationships;
- continuing professional development;
- peer consultation;
- reflective practice;
- training programmes;
- feedback mechanisms.

Evaluation should be conducted in a manner that is:

- fair;
- respectful;
- constructive;
- confidential where appropriate;
- focused on improvement rather than punishment.

The objective is to strengthen religious leadership and enhance service to the community.

6. Safeguarding Within Governance Structures

Governance and oversight bodies carry a significant safeguarding responsibility.

They must ensure that:

- safeguarding policies are properly implemented;
- allegations of abuse are handled appropriately;
- vulnerable individuals are protected;
- clear reporting pathways exist;
- investigations are conducted fairly and transparently;
- legal obligations are fulfilled;

- victims are supported with dignity and care.

Safeguarding must always take priority over institutional reputation, personal relationships, or organisational interests.

Failure to uphold safeguarding responsibilities constitutes a serious breach of trust.

7. Handling Complaints and Grievances

Institutions should establish clear, accessible, and fair mechanisms for handling complaints and grievances.

These mechanisms should ensure that:

- concerns can be raised safely and without fear of retaliation;
- complaints are treated seriously and impartially;
- due process is followed;
- confidentiality is respected where appropriate;
- outcomes are communicated clearly;
- corrective action is taken where necessary.

Complaints procedures are essential for maintaining trust and accountability within religious institutions.

8. Protection of Religious Leaders

Accountability systems should also recognise the need to protect religious leaders from:

- false accusations;
- defamation;
- harassment;
- undue pressure;
- institutional neglect;
- public misrepresentation.

Justice requires fairness to all parties.

Religious leaders are entitled to:

- due process;
- institutional support;
- legal protection where necessary;
- safeguarding from abuse or exploitation;
- fair evaluation of conduct and performance.

A healthy governance system protects both communities and those who serve them.

9. Unity and Diversity Within Oversight

Islamic scholarly tradition has always included diversity of opinion within recognised methodological frameworks.

Oversight structures should reflect this diversity while maintaining unity on:

- core Islamic principles;
- safeguarding standards;
- ethical conduct;
- public trust;
- justice and accountability.

Differences in jurisprudential opinion should be managed with respect and scholarly integrity, avoiding sectarianism or exclusion.

The aim is not uniformity of thought, but unity of purpose and ethical responsibility.

10. The Higher Purpose of Accountability

Ultimately, accountability in Islamic leadership is not merely procedural or institutional; it is spiritual and moral.

All systems of governance exist to serve a higher purpose:

- safeguarding faith;
- protecting human dignity;
- ensuring justice;
- preventing harm;
- promoting welfare;
- enabling sincere worship of Allah.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> *"Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and He forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression." (Qur'an 16:90)*

Religious leaders and institutions must therefore ensure that accountability structures reflect these divine principles in both spirit and practice.

The ultimate accountability is before Allah, and all worldly systems of governance are meaningful only insofar as they serve that reality.

PART VII

Implementation, Adaptation and Global Application

1. The Purpose and Nature of This Code

This Code of Conduct is intended to serve as a global ethical and professional framework for Imams, scholars, religious teachers, female scholars, chaplains, counsellors, and du'āt working within diverse communities across different countries and cultural contexts.

It is not intended to function as a rigid or legally prescriptive manual. Rather, it is a set of guiding principles rooted in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the broader ethical tradition of Islamic scholarship, designed to support sound judgement, contextual wisdom, and professional excellence.

The diversity of Muslim communities across the world requires flexibility, contextual awareness, and adaptability while maintaining fidelity to core Islamic ethical principles.

2. Universality of Principles, Flexibility of Application

The principles contained within this Code are universal in their moral and ethical intent. They reflect values that are grounded in:

- the Qur'anic message of justice, mercy, and integrity;
- the Prophetic example of compassion and leadership;
- the classical objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*);
- the established ethical heritage of Islamic scholarship.

However, the application of these principles may vary according to:

- local laws and regulatory frameworks;
- cultural norms and sensitivities;
- institutional structures and capacities;
- community needs and demographics;
- differing legal schools (*madhāhib*) and scholarly interpretations.

Religious leaders and institutions are therefore encouraged to interpret and implement this Code in ways that are faithful to its principles while appropriate to their local contexts.

3. Local Adaptation and Contextual Implementation

This Code is designed to be adopted and adapted by religious councils, institutions, mosques, educational bodies, and scholarly organisations in different regions of the world.

Local adaptation may include:

- developing supplementary guidelines aligned with national legal systems;
- integrating cultural considerations that do not conflict with Islamic principles;
- establishing region-specific safeguarding frameworks;
- creating professional training pathways appropriate to local needs;

- forming institutional policies that reflect community realities.

In all cases, adaptation must not compromise fundamental Islamic ethical principles such as:

- justice;
- safeguarding of life and dignity;
- honesty and trustworthiness;
- prohibition of harm and exploitation;
- protection of vulnerable individuals;
- accountability before Allah.

4. Institutional Adoption and Governance Integration

For effective implementation, institutions are encouraged to formally adopt this Code as part of their governance and professional framework.

This may include:

- incorporating it into employment contracts and role descriptions;
- integrating it into training and induction programmes;
- aligning it with safeguarding and HR policies;
- using it as a reference for performance review and supervision;
- embedding it into institutional constitutions or constitutive documents.

Institutions should also ensure that religious leaders are made aware of their ethical responsibilities upon appointment and receive ongoing support in fulfilling them.

5. Training, Education and Professional Formation

The implementation of this Code requires structured education and training at multiple levels.

This includes:

- pre-service training for aspiring Imams and scholars;
- continuous professional development for serving religious leaders;
- specialised training in safeguarding, counselling, and leadership;
- mentorship programmes led by senior scholars and practitioners;
- interdisciplinary training involving education, psychology, law, and social services.

Training should emphasise not only knowledge acquisition but also ethical formation, character development, and practical application.

6. Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

This Code should be understood as a living framework that benefits from reflection, feedback, and periodic review.

Institutions and governing bodies should establish mechanisms to:

- assess its effectiveness in practice;
- gather feedback from religious leaders and communities;
- review emerging ethical and social challenges;
- update guidance in light of new contexts and knowledge;
- ensure ongoing relevance and applicability.

The process of review should be conducted with scholarly integrity, consultation (*shūrā*), and awareness of both tradition and contemporary realities.

7. Unity of Purpose Across Diversity of Contexts

Despite the diversity of Muslim communities globally, this Code affirms a unity of ethical purpose grounded in the core values of Islam.

Religious leaders across different regions share a common responsibility to:

- uphold justice and integrity;
- serve their communities with sincerity;
- protect the vulnerable;
- transmit knowledge responsibly;
- maintain public trust;
- embody prophetic character;
- act as agents of mercy and guidance.

This unity of purpose transcends cultural, national, and institutional differences while allowing for legitimate diversity in implementation.

8. The Role of the Global Imams and Scholars Council

The Global Imams and Scholars Council is envisioned as a coordinating and guiding body that:

- promotes ethical standards across diverse contexts;
- facilitates scholarly collaboration and consultation;
- supports institutional development and capacity building;
- encourages consistency in safeguarding and professional practice;
- provides guidance on complex or emerging ethical issues;
- fosters unity and mutual support among religious leaders globally.

Its role is advisory and facilitative rather than coercive, recognising that implementation will always depend upon local institutions and contexts.

9. Ethical Authority and Moral Leadership

The authority of this Code does not derive from enforcement mechanisms alone, but from its grounding in Islamic ethical principles and its reflection of shared scholarly values.

Its effectiveness depends upon:

- sincerity of intention;
- institutional commitment;
- communal trust;
- scholarly endorsement;
- practical relevance;
- consistent application.

Religious leaders are encouraged to engage with this Code not merely as a set of rules, but as a framework for moral reflection, professional excellence, and spiritual responsibility.

10. Concluding Vision: A Global Standard of Excellence

This Code aspires to contribute to the development of a global standard of excellence in Islamic religious leadership.

Such excellence is characterised by:

- deep knowledge and sound scholarship;
- exemplary character and integrity;
- professional competence and accountability;
- safeguarding and protection of the vulnerable;
- financial honesty and transparency;
- constructive community engagement;
- humility before Allah and service to humanity.

The ultimate aim is the cultivation of religious leaders who embody the Prophetic model in their knowledge, character, conduct, and service, and who contribute to the flourishing

of individuals, families, and societies.

Allah, the Most High, states:

> *"And who is better in speech than one who calls to Allah, does righteousness, and says: indeed I am among those who submit." (Qur'an 41:33)*

May this effort be a means of guidance, protection, unity, and benefit for the global Muslim community.



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GLOBAL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR IMAMS, SCHOLARS, RELIGIOUS TEACHERS AND DUʿĀT

A Framework of Ethical Guidance and Professional Principles for Religious Leaders Worldwide

GLOBAL IMAMS & SCHOLARS COUNCIL