

# Can Muslims Migrate to Non- Muslim Countries?

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورزم

The word Muslim means the one who obeys the commandments of Allah/God and His commandment is to live in peace, respect humanity and follow the rules and regulations of the country you live in unless the state prevents you from practising the rituals of your religion. If this is the matter, you are allowed to migrate from the country but you are not to harm their citizens or damage the infrastructure of their state.

There is a great example in early Islam when Allah commanded early Muslims to start migration to a Non-Muslim (Christian) country (Abyssinia) where they would feel peace and comfort.

***Those who migrate for the sake of Allah after having been wronged, We will surely settle them in a good place in the world, and the rewards of the Hereafter is surely greater, had they known. Those who are patient and put their trust in their Lord. (Quran: 16:41-42)***

According to a historian, this verse was specifically a commandment from Lord for Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia).

At that time, the Christian country was far better for Muslims to migrate to than the pagan country they were living in. The first journey of Muslims in the history of Islam was the migration to Abyssinia. We learn at least two lessons from this journey.

- 1- When Muslims are persecuted in their own country, they can migrate if the opportunity is available and find a land that is ruled by a just leader and where the state provides justice and equal opportunity to the citizens without any discrimination.
- 2- Muslims have an obligation to obey the rules and laws of the country as long as they have the right of religious practice.

At that time, the prime reason of Muslims to migrate to a Christian country (Ethiopia) was that the ruler of the country was intolerant towards injustice and it was a friendly country with a desirable religious and political atmosphere. This was the reason that Allah ordered Muslims to migrate to there until such time as Allah shall relieve them from such distress.

Now the question is this, why did Prophet (PBUH) not ask Muslims to migrate to Yemen, even though it was nearer to them than the Christian country (Ethiopia)? The answer is, at that time, Yemen was not a preferred option because it was under the rule of Khusro Pervez (an Iranian king), who, when received the Prophet's letter, wanted him (the Prophet) arrested. The other option was Syria but again, it was not a great option either because it was far from Mecca and secondly, it had a trade cooperation treaty with the Meccan pagans. If Muslims had migrated to either of the two countries, they would have been expelled at the request of the Quraysh (Meccan pagans). Ethiopia was a Christian country and Muslims found it to be a prosperous country with justice and a calm and free social and political atmosphere. Umm Salmah (The future wife of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) said, "When we settled in Ethiopia, we found ourselves under the protection of the best supporter and we did not experience any trouble."

It is noted that the Quran mentioned the word of migration (Hijrah) in 27 verses. Allah made migration compulsory for Muslims if they are persecuted in the way of Allah and they are free to travel in those lands where they sustain in peace and without any persecution.

In one of the Quranic verses, we find an alliance between the Muslim immigrants and those who gave them shelter, refuge and asylum. Those countries that have a peace treaty/alliance with the Muslims or the Muslim states, come under the below Quranic verse.

Allah Says in the holy Quran:

**“Verily, those who believed and emigrated and strove hard and struggled with their property and their lives in the cause of Allah as well as those who gave (them) asylum and help, these are (all) allied to one another.....” (Quran, 08:72)**

The first and second migration of early Muslims to Ethiopia was due to the religious persecution. The early Muslims’ right to practise their chosen religion was restricted by the Meccan state which, at the time was ruled under the tribe of Quraysh. It was the same tribe that gave birth to the Prophet of Islam. They were imprisoned, tortured, displaced from their homes, social and morally boycotted and banned to practice and propagate the newly formed religion in the streets of Mecca. The life of early Muslims was completely distressed and their businesses were destroyed by the social boycott.

It became very hard for Muslims to live and practice their religion openly without any fear of persecution. They were helpless and found no way out from this catastrophic situation. At that time, Allah gave them the good news by revealing the commandment through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) of the migration to Ethiopia, a Christian country. The third migration of Muslims, including the prophet of Islam was in Medina, a city that is located about 453 km from Mecca. The city welcomed the Prophet and Muslims and offered them to live in peace and practice the religion of Islam without the fear of any persecution. Later, most of the city’s inhabitants became Muslims and the Prophet of Islam made the city a hub of Islam and lived in the city until his death.

Muslims have learnt the lesson from these early migrations that, if they come under persecution, especially religious persecution, they are allowed under the Islamic law/rule to migrate to a country where they can find refuge and freedom. It does not matter whether their new country is run by a non-Muslim ruler or not, as long as the state provides the basic human rights to the immigrants without any discrimination. Therefore, it is permissible and even obligatory upon Muslims to migrate from their own country towards a non-Muslim country under some political and religious conditions. Migration within an Islamic country is very much preferable under the Islamic Law, if a Muslim has two options to migrate, within a Muslim country and to a Non-Muslim country, then it is preferred under the Islamic law that he migrates to the Muslim country instead of the Non-Muslim one.

According to Zakariya al-Ansaari al-Shaafa’i:

**“It is obligatory to migrate from Non-Muslim lands to the Muslim lands for those who are able to do that, if they are unable to practice their religion openly.”**

So, we refute the claim of Islamists that Muslims are not allowed to migrate in Non-Muslim countries. Indeed, Muslims can travel and stay in countries ruled by Non-Muslims if they do not harm them for practising their religion.

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