

## BEYOND MATERIAL PROGRESS: REASSESSING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MAQASID AL-QURAN

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores human development as a holistic process grounded in the Quran's maqasid (higher objectives), moving beyond modern approaches that often centre narrowly on material and economic indicators. While development thinking shifted in the late twentieth century to focus more directly on human welfare emphasizing education, fair distribution, and protection of rights such frameworks emerged late and struggled to prevent rising poverty, unemployment, and inequality. In contrast, this study describes the Islamic perspective as reflected in the Quran, which integrates the spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions of development, and deduces how these maqasid lay the foundation for a balanced model of human flourishing. Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship, this article outlines core objectives such as refining character, protecting human dignity and life, promoting knowledge and freedom, ensuring justice, and affirming humanity's role as khulafa' (vicegerents) on earth. The article concludes that the Quranic maqasid offer a comprehensive, ethically anchored framework for human development that remains profoundly relevant today, emphasizing that genuine progress must harmonize spiritual purpose, moral integrity, and collective responsibility to achieve sustainable human well-being.

**Keywords:** Human Development, Maqasid al-Quran, Quranic Objectives

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Human Development (HD)' as a formal development paradigm emerged prominently in the late 1980s and was popularized in 1990 with the publication of the first United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDR). (Haq, 1995). In modern days, development is commonly assessed through material indicators listed under the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 1990, 2024). The HDI encompasses dimensions such as income and wealth, literacy and education, life expectancy, political participation, access to clean water and sanitation, overall living standards, and gender equality. Nevertheless, in addition to material progress, ethical and spiritual dimensions rooted in religion are crucial to the comprehensive development of human society (Chapra, 2008).

Modern societies have made tremendous achievements in material development (Abdulhameed, 2021). However, neglecting religious and moral values has made this progress counterproductive, often harming human well-being. The erosion of religious ethics has weakened respect for human dignity, trust, and fairness in social and economic life, fueling inequality, mental unrest, and conflicts worldwide. As Chapra (2008) notes, the Quran 13:11 reminds us that people shape their own development or decline. True development must balance material and spiritual needs to ensure lasting human welfare and prevent societal collapse. Islam offers a comprehensive framework that not only establishes the foundation for social relations but also upholds moral principles that guide economic, political, and ethical responsibilities within society (Oladapo & Ab Rahman, 2017). The moral principles of Islam constitute the basic foundation of HD, which is based on the Quranic maqasid (objectives).

The term maqasid means ‘objectives’ (singular: maqṣad, meaning ‘an objective’), while the Quran is the divine source of Islamic guidance and law. Together, the phrase maqasid al-Quran refers to the theory concerned with identifying and understanding the higher objectives underlying Quranic discourse. These objectives extend to every aspect of human existence, including both individual and collective development. As a discipline, maqasid al-Quran focuses on uncovering the deeper purposes and overarching aims of the Quranic message (Islam, 2011). Ibn ‘Ashur (1984) goes on to elaborate that the Quran’s objectives (maqasid) aim to guide human well-being and societal reform. He identified eight key objectives: correcting belief, refining character, establishing laws, guiding community organization and governance, educating through stories of past nations, providing education suited to the audience’s time, offering exhortation, warnings, and encouragement, and demonstrating its divine truth through its miraculous nature. These objectives collectively lay the foundation for moral, intellectual, and social development.

Similarly, Riḍa (1990) expanded the understanding of the Quran’s objectives (maqasid) by highlighting their relevance in modern social and political life. He outlined ten objectives: clarifying the true meaning of belief in God, resurrection, and righteous action; explaining the realities of prophethood and the roles of messengers; affirming the innate soundness of Islam; promoting social, political, and national reform; outlining Islam’s unique principles for personal obligations; defining its political and international principles; guiding sound financial management; regulating warfare to limit harm and injustice; securing full rights for women; and abolishing slavery. According to Riḍa, these objectives reflect the Quran’s comprehensive vision of human progress, justice, and dignity. Meanwhile, al-Qaraḍawi (2000) established seven key objectives of the Quran: correcting beliefs and perceptions about divinity, prophethood, and accountability; affirming human dignity and rights; calling people to worship Allah alone; purifying the human soul and refining moral character; building righteous families and ensuring justice for women; establishing a Muslim community that serves as a witness over humanity; and calling for a cooperative, humane global society. Whereas, al-‘Alwani (2003) pinpointed three overarching objectives, which he termed “The Higher Governing Objectives of the Quran (Al-Maqasid al-Quraniyyah al-‘Ulya al-Hakimah)”: Tawḥid (affirming the Oneness of God), Tazkiyah (purification and moral upliftment), and ‘Umran (civilizational development). Together, these perspectives emphasize that the Quran’s vision extends beyond ritual practice to the complete spiritual, ethical, and societal flourishing of humanity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a descriptive and deductive methodology to examine HD through the lens of maqasid al-Quran (the higher objectives of the Quran). It begins by outlining prevailing conceptions of HD as articulated in contemporary economic and development literature. Building on this foundation, the research conducts a qualitative textual analysis of selected Quranic verses, drawing upon classical and modern scholarship. Through this approach, the study identifies central objectives related to HD. Rather than relying on empirical data, the study integrates conceptual reflection and textual interpretation to demonstrate how the Quranic framework offers a comprehensive and ethically grounded alternative to predominantly materialistic models of human development.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **HD in Contemporary Economic Discourse**

In the years leading up to the 1980s, various attempts were made to achieve the desired development goals, especially after the world emerged from devastating world wars that resulted in widespread destruction, disrupted production, and negative growth rates (Maddison, 2001). As a result, most countries have strongly sought to accelerate reconstruction, development, and production—particularly with the discovery of new energy sources capable of boosting development and growth, such as oil and electricity (Cleveland, 2023; Johnstone & McLeish, 2020). Simultaneously, there has been a steady increase in population and a growing demand for healthcare, education, and employment (United Nations, 2004).

However, despite extensive post-war reconstruction efforts, many development programs fell short of their goals, principally because they neglected the human dimension of development. These programs often focused narrowly on economic indicators such as GDP growth, industrial output, and infrastructural expansion, overlooking critical aspects of individual well-being. As a result, economic growth did not always translate into improved living standards or reduced inequality, particularly in developing countries. It was in this context that the concept of HD emerged clearly in the first HDR issued by the UNDP in 1990 (UNDP, 1990). This report marked a paradigm shift by introducing the Human Development Index (HDI), which reoriented development discourse from a goods-based model to a people-centred approach. Instead of focusing solely on economic indicators, the HDI emphasized key dimensions of human welfare, such as life expectancy, education, and health, thereby placing human well-being at the core of development policy.

The first HDR by UNDP defined HD as “the process of enlarging people’s choices” (UNDP, 1990). These choices include the ability to lead a long and healthy life, attain education, and enjoy a decent standard of living, along with access to political freedom, guaranteed human rights, and elements essential to self-respect (UNDP, 1997). Building on this, Haq (1995) described HD as “the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being”. He maintains that HD is all about the real freedom ordinary people have to decide who to be, what to do, and how to live. Similarly, as per the conceptualization of Sen (2011), a leading figure in the HD approach, development should not be measured solely by economic growth or industrial progress.

Instead, it is defined by the enhancement of human freedoms and the removal of barriers such as poverty, tyranny, and lack of opportunity. He emphasizes that wealth and resources are only means to an end. HD is thus achieved when people gain greater substantive freedoms—real opportunities to lead the kinds of lives they value. Corm (1997) reinforced this view by arguing that HD should not be limited to economic aspects alone but should focus on increasing people's capabilities to achieve their full potential as individuals and as communities, where economic capacity is only one part of these broader capabilities.

Despite the efforts undertaken under the auspices of the UN since 1990, these attempts did not always produce the desired results, and in some regions, living conditions worsened instead of improving (UNDP, 2005). The UN's influence in implementing HD programs has been limited by factors such as entrenched economic models, high costs of restructuring, and tensions between profit-driven multinationals and the core goal of prioritizing human needs in development. Additionally, weak political will, governance challenges, and limited institutional capacity have hindered progress. In many cases, the transformative vision of HD has been diluted by top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches and insufficient coordination among international actors.

### **HD in Islamic Economic Thought**

Islam, in addition to being the final divine message to humanity, also serves as a divine constitution regulating economic, social, political, and other aspects of Muslim society. (al-Qaraḍawi, 1999; Chapra, 1992). It covers all matters related to people's lives and livelihoods. Indeed, the maqasid (objectives) of Islam represent a progressive vision aimed at preserving life, progeny, and wealth—considered necessities without which human life cannot function properly (Auda, 2008). Western thought has strived to achieve similar goals to ensure a dignified life for its followers. Yet these efforts often culminate in destructive wars and societies plagued by moral and financial bankruptcy. Although the fundamental approach of Western development plans shifted in the last quarter of the 20th century towards a greater focus on human beings, this transformation came late. Consumerist attitudes had already deeply permeated Western economies and were transmitted to economies of the so-called Third World. As a result, economies everywhere lost their human dimension, with profit as the sole driver dominating economic and commercial thinking.

Before exploring the concept of HD in Islam, it is worth discussing Islamic development more broadly. It is distinct for its comprehensiveness, balance, realism, justice, responsibility, and efficiency. Its goal is to enable humans to truly serve as Allah's vicegerents (caliphs) on Earth (al-Shukayri, 1988). These features make Islamic development highly effective and successful, rooted in a philosophical approach built upon three core theological concepts: Tawḥid (Oneness of Allah), Khilafah (vicegerency), and Tazkiyah (spiritual and moral purification) (al-Faruqi, 2000; al-'Atṭas, 1993; Auda, 2008). These foundations are unique to the Islamic paradigm.

Furthermore, Islam presents an economic system that encourages the utilization of resources entrusted to humans, viewing worldly wealth as a trust from Allah to test human faith. This wealth ultimately belongs to Allah and is meant to achieve the purposes of the divine law, including public benefit and economic and social justice (Chapra, 1992)

This Islamic economic approach offers a reliable guarantee for genuine development: resources are harnessed to support humanity's role as God's stewards on Earth; they are seen as a shared trust for the benefit of all people, rather than the privilege of a few. Within this framework of economic and social justice, there is no favouritism for one group over another, and wealth is distributed according to effort and work. In our view, this is the true essence of HD.

When discussing HD, it differs in Islamic economic thought from a conventional perspective. In Islam, human beings are always at the centre, even though there may be similarities in goals and resources (al-Kamali, 2014). Moreover, Islamic development—whether in general or in its HD aspect is framed by an ethical system derived from the Quran and Sunnah. It aims for human well-being and happiness, and its procedures and policies must remain within the boundaries of Islamic law (al-Shukayri, 1988). According to Dawabah (2007) Islam also sees HD as a path to the “good life” (*ḥayat tayyibah*). As Allah says:

"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely grant him a good life"

(Al-Naḥl 16:97).

Prosperity, freedom, health, education, and employment opportunities are all elements that ensure a dignified and good life. Allah further declares:

“We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created”

(Al-Isra' 17:70).

This represents the ultimate form of human dignity, bestowed by the Creator Himself. Islam also emphasizes ensuring every person's fair share of the nation's production to secure a minimum standard of living—contrary to what many Muslim countries face today: restricted freedoms, absence of justice, declining health standards, poor education, and difficulty finding work. Additionally, HD in the Islamic framework is intellectual, moral, and administrative, alongside being economic, social, and political (al-Kamali, 2014). Its main foundations can be summarized as follows:

**1. Granting humans the role of vicegerency (khalifah):** Allah honoured humans with reason, the capacity to think and learn, and the availability of material resources to fulfil this mission of stewardship and building civilization (Raḥman, 1980). As Allah said:

“And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (khalifah)’”

(Al-Baqarah 2:30).

“And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth – all from Him”

(Al-Jathiyah 45:13).

**2. Mandating humans to build and cultivate the earth:** Allah says:

“It is He who produced you from the earth and settled you therein”

(Hud 11:61).

This includes both the material and spiritual aspects. Islam requires that the development of the earth be grounded in God-consciousness (taqwa). Unlike today’s world, where material advancement is the main measure of progress, Islam measures human excellence in this life and the hereafter through faith and righteous action; if either is absent, society falters (al-‘Awadi, 2009).

**3. Honouring humanity:** As in:

“We have certainly honoured the children of Adam”

(Al-Isra’ 17:70).

Allah granted humans freedom, liberated them from servitude to other humans, and entrusted them with the responsibility of developing the earth by using reason and resources within the framework of divine guidance.

**4. Adherence to Islamic values and a sound social and economic environment:** Belief in God’s oneness, acknowledgment that everything in the universe is under His control, and recognition of humans’ unique status as rational beings entrusted with stewardship create a cohesive society and supportive conditions for work and creativity (Ahmad, 2004). The absence of social cohesion leads to development failure, regardless of resources.

**5. The virtue of work:** Allah says:

“And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah and remember Allah often that you may succeed”

(Al-Jumu‘ah 62:10).

Islam encourages productive work and only prohibits activities that contradict divine law. It encourages the production of essential goods and the provision of necessary human services.

### **Reviewing Quranic Objectives Related to HD**

The Noble Quran, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through successive transmission (tawatur), is the only divine scripture that Allah has promised to preserve from distortion—unlike earlier scriptures that suffered alteration. Over the centuries, the Quran has been the focus of extensive scholarly work, including recitation, interpretation, commentary, and efforts to uncover its higher objectives (maqasid). Exploring these maqasid has become an essential approach for Muslims today to understand the deeper meanings of Quranic verses and to draw from them guidance for reform and progress (Auda, 2008).

A Muslim striving for societal improvement and development is unlikely to succeed by depending solely on outdated Western economic and social philosophies. Instead, true success lies in adopting an Islamic philosophy rooted in the Quran itself a philosophy that offers principles and rulings aimed at ensuring human well-being and holistic development. As al-Kamali (2014) notes, “Islam views HD as nurturing human potential, harnessing the environment for human benefit, overcoming challenges, and transforming surroundings to bring happiness and fulfil aspirations.”

Being the flawless word of Allah, the Quran provides guidance encompassing every dimension of human life religious, social, economic, etc. Although the modern term “HD” emerged recently, its essence can readily be discerned through reflection on the Quranic verses revealed over 1400 years ago. Human beings have been at the central concern from the outset: honoured with a divine mandate to populate and cultivate the earth and granted access to material resources for this mission. Thus, HD in Islam, particularly in the Quran, follows an ethical framework aimed at protecting human beings from harm, securing their benefits, meeting their needs, and fulfilling their legitimate aspirations. By contrast, despite modern economic theories eventually adopting terms like “HD” and “humanizing development,” these concepts often serve to soften the reality of systems primarily designed to channel wealth toward powerful elites and reinforce their control over the global economy (Stiglitz, 2013). Before discussing the maqasid (objectives) of Quranic verses related to HD, it is important to clarify that this study focuses on the three main dimensions of HD from the perspective of the Quran’s objectives:

### **1. A Healthy Life Free from Illness**

Human beings have been entrusted with the duty of building and cultivating the earth (‘imarah) and honored with the role of vicegerency (khilafah). This responsibility is supported by the mental, physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities granted to help them fulfill this mission. Islamic law (shari‘ah) has identified five necessities (al-daruriyyat al-khams): the preservation of life, intellect, lineage, religion, and wealth (al-Shaṭībī, 2004). These are essential for the proper functioning of society and to enable humans to fulfil their divine duties. Allah says:

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature”

(At-Tin, 95:4),

“And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and preferred them over much of what We have created”

(Al-Isra’, 17:70).

According to al-Khayyat (2000), the objective reflected in these verses is that Islam seeks to protect human life in both material and spiritual aspects: safeguarding physical well-being, upholding dignity, honouring the intellect, ensuring sustenance, and prohibiting self-harm and suicide. This reflects Islam’s deep commitment to preserving life and dignity, guiding humanity through reason and divine revelation free from idolatry and superstition. It also stresses proper nutrition and forbids self-harm through excessive asceticism or harmful deprivation (al-Ghazali, 2015; al-Qaradawi, 1999).

This advanced Quranic vision of preserving life stands in contrast to modern human and social theories and UN development policies, which have achieved limited success in certain regions. Despite the past century witnessing the independence of many nations and the establishment of the UN, the world has seen rising levels of oppression, violence, disease, and restrictions on freedom (Pogge, 2002).

## 2. Pursuing Knowledge and Ensuring Means for a Noble Life

Allah says:

“Read in the name of your Lord who created”

(Al-‘Alaq, 96:1).

Islam encourages seeking knowledge, understanding, and protecting the mind from ignorance (al-‘Aṭṭas, 1999; Nasr, 1989). Humanity was honoured with intellect and comprehension to reflect and contemplate, starting from recognizing the purpose of creation: worshipping Allah and fulfilling the mission of building the earth (al-Faruqi, 2000; Sardar, 1985). Early Muslims’ appreciation for knowledge led to countless contributions in medicine, engineering, astronomy, philosophy, and beyond laying the foundations for the Western scientific and cultural renaissance (Robinson, 2016; Saliba, 2007). During the height of Islamic civilization, the Muslim world excelled scientifically, economically, politically, and socially (Bennison, 2009; Morgan, 2008). However, knowledge alone isn’t sufficient; adequate resources are necessary to fulfill the human role of vicegerency. Thus, Allah’s imposition of responsibility (taklif) was accompanied by facilitation (taskhir): Allah, in His wisdom, created and shaped countless blessings on land, sea, and in the air to suit human needs, capacities, and understanding. The Quran repeatedly highlights that Allah has subjugated the earth’s resources to humanity’s service, as in:

“Do you not see that Allah has subjected to you whatever is on the earth and the ships which run through the sea by His command?”

(Al-Ḥajj, 22:65)

“And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favour of Allah, you could not enumerate them”

(Ibrahim, 14:32–34).

These verses affirm that Allah Almighty created and subjugated various kinds of resources for human beings so that they may utilize them in accordance with the divine guidance, thereby attaining a dignified and good life, which, in fact, is the ultimate objective of HD that is sadly lacking today.

According to the Islamic perspective, as al-Subhani (2005) points out, the human being is not a disobedient outcast or a fugitive without purpose; rather, he is the noble representative, entrusted with the most honourable vicegerency. This vicegerency forms human identity, existence, purpose, and a positive role in life, and protects the individual, society, and civilization from alienation and loss. It is further emphasized that human happiness is a central concern of Islam, achieved through spiritual fulfilment and by safeguarding life, intellect, and lineage, while ethical management and fair distribution of resources pave the way for true prosperity (Chapra, 1985).

### 3. Safeguarding Political, Economic, and Social Freedoms and Human Rights

The maqasid-based understanding of Quranic verses related to human freedoms—whether political, economic, social, or concerning human rights—begins with the Islamic view of the human being: a creation honoured by Allah with a noble character, intellect, and granted the capacity to discern right from wrong. Allah says:

“There is no compulsion in religion; the right path has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in false gods (taghut) and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest handhold, which will never break. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing”

(Al-Baqarah, 2:256).

This verse highlights the servant’s submission to Allah alone, freeing him from subjugation to people or institutions that might restrict his political or social views or impose economic choices. Islam came to free people from servitude to humans and direct them to servitude of the Lord of all creation. Another verse states:

“Indeed, we offered the al-amanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; yet man undertook to bear it. Indeed, he was [by nature] unjust and ignorant”

(Al-Aḥzab, 33:72)

It becomes clear that the fact that Allah distinguished humans from all other creatures by entrusting them with the responsibility of stewardship is itself proof of the freedom granted to them in making choices a divine gift that cannot be granted or revoked by any earthly law. Humans are born free, as famously proclaimed by Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: “Since when do you enslave people when their mothers bore them free?” The very essence of Islam’s message is to give life to humanity to awaken and liberate human potentials, so that people’s actions and movements arise authentically from within and are directed sincerely towards Allah, the Almighty. Allah says:

“O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life”

(Al-Anfal, 8:24).

“O mankind, We created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another; indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous”

(Al-Ḥujurat, 49:13).

True honour, then, lies not in lineage or wealth but in piety—a universal value that transcends worldly hierarchies. To explain this further, here is a brief outline of the different dimensions of human freedoms in Islam:

## **A. Political freedoms:**

The source of the freedoms enjoyed by human beings is Allah Almighty Himself. Humanity was created primarily to worship Allah, as He says:

"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me"

(Adh-Dhariyat, 51:56).

Submission to Allah alone frees human beings from subjugation to other humans and from having their freedoms restricted or destinies controlled by others. Political freedoms are closely tied to freedom of thought, for humans have been endowed with intellect and free will, and granted freedom from birth to choose their path (Ghara'ibah, 2000). Freedom of opinion is thus upheld in Islamic belief, aligning with human nature and the purpose of existence. Political freedoms in Islam are fundamentally rooted in the principle of shura (consultation). Allah says: “

"And [mention] when your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I will make upon the earth a vicegerent.’ They said, ‘Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?’ Allah said, ‘Indeed, I know that which you do not know.’ And He taught Adam the names all of them. Then He presented them to the angels and said, ‘Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.”

(Al-Baqarah, 2:30–32)

This act of consultation served as an ideal model for Muslims, so all their affairs should be guided by shura. Allah also instructed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to remind and guide people without compelling them to accept what he wanted, leaving their accountability to Allah: “

So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller.”

(Al-Ghashiyah, 88:21–22).

## **B. Economic Freedoms**

In continuation of the discussion on political freedoms, economic freedoms in Islamic thought are regarded as an essential complement to individual and political liberties. Economic freedom in Islam is fundamentally rooted in the principle that ultimate ownership of everything in the universe belongs solely to Allah. As the Quran declares:

“Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and you have not besides Allah any protector or helper?” (

Al-Baqarah, 2:107)

“And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them; and to Him is the [final] destination.”

(Al-Ma'idah, 5:18).

These verses illustrate a foundational concept within the Islamic worldview: while Allah is the true Owner, human beings are vicegerents (khalifah) entrusted to utilize and manage resources as permitted by divine guidance. As Hilali (2010) observes: Each individual thus enjoys the freedom to choose an economic activity aligned with personal interests and capabilities, provided it does not contradict Islamic legal principles or fall into harmful professions. Moreover, Sharia encourages professional work and earning a livelihood to fulfill people's needs. This perspective is further supported by Quranic encouragement towards good action:

“And do good that you may succeed.”

(Al-Hajj, 22:77).

At the same time, the Quran emphasizes that human life inevitably involves struggle and responsibility, as highlighted in the verse:

“We have certainly created man into hardship.”

(Al-Balad, 90:4)

Despite affirming economic freedom, Islam sets ethical boundaries to safeguard individual welfare and the collective interest of society. The Quran clarifies:

“They ask you about the bounties (al-anfal). Say, ‘The bounties belong to Allah and the Messenger.’ So fear Allah and set right that which is between you and obey Allah and His Messenger if you should be believers.”

(Al-Anfal, 8:1).

This verse signifies that the right to private ownership cannot override the public good especially regarding shared resources such as minerals, forests, seas, and other natural assets. This principle reflects one of the distinguishing strengths of Islamic economic model: it protects public resources from unrestricted individual exploitation, which may prioritize profit over environmental sustainability and intergenerational equity. Furthermore, Islamic HD aspires to secure dignified living standards by ensuring diverse employment opportunities that align with each person's abilities. True human dignity, in this view, is achieved not solely through formal legal freedoms but also through economic independence, freedom from dependence on others, and liberation from subjugation.

This principle lies at the heart of the Islamic economic system derived from the Quran. Crucially, Islam does not perceive the human being merely as a productive unit, as some socialist models do, nor as a market-valued commodity, as seen in capitalist frameworks. Rather, each individual is regarded as a morally responsible agent, entrusted with fulfilling divine commands and avoiding prohibitions. By doing so, a person attains authentic success and lasting well-being.

### **C. Social Freedom**

The Quran transformed Arab society from one mired in pre-Islamic ignorance (jahiliyyah) into a compassionate, cooperative, and morally elevated community. This transformation is vividly reflected in the words of Ja‘far ibn Abi Ṭalib when he stood before the Negus (al-Najashi) of Abyssinia and explained why Quraysh’s idolatrous leaders persecuted the Muslims. He said:

“O King, we were a people steeped in ignorance: we worshipped idols, consumed carrion, indulged in sexual immorality, severed family ties, mistreated neighbours, and the strong among us oppressed the weak. We remained in this state until Allah sent us a Messenger—whose lineage, honesty, trustworthiness, and chastity we knew well—who called us to worship Allah alone and renounce what we and our forefathers worshipped besides Him of stones and idols. He commanded us to speak truthfully, fulfil our trusts, uphold family ties, honour good neighbourliness, and refrain from what is forbidden and from shedding blood. He forbade us from immorality, false speech, consuming the wealth of orphans, and slandering chaste women. And he commanded us to worship Allah alone without associating partners with Him, and enjoined upon us prayer, charity, and fasting”

(al-Bukhari, 1997)

What law, constitution, or policy could so comprehensively set out this moral and ethical framework that grants people true freedom, liberates their minds, protects their lives, honours their dignity, and preserves their wealth? The Quran laid down the foundation for a society in which social freedom is guaranteed for all its members, without discrimination. Allah says:

“O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

(Al-Ḥujurat, 49:13).

These verses unambiguously establish that, in Islam, human worth and honour are measured by piety (taqwa). As al-‘Ani (2002) observes, humans are by nature social beings who prefer to live among families, clans, and wider communities. Yet Islam rejects all discrimination based on gender, colour, or lineage; instead, it upholds piety as the sole standard of merit. Under this system, an individual does not submit to the dictates of any sect or ideological faction, for his or her life and choices belong ultimately to the Creator alone. Social freedom, therefore, includes a person’s ability to live in the manner they find comfortable so long as it aligns with Islamic ethical guidelines and remains free from interference by political or religious authorities.

### **D. Human Rights**

Human rights in Islam differ from those found in secular laws primarily in their source: in Islam, these rights are derived from the Quran, the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition), and other established sources of Islamic law such as qiyas (analogical reasoning) and ijtihad (independent juristic effort). Allah says:

“Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they find described in the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong, makes lawful for them the good things, prohibits for them the evil, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles that were upon them. So those who believe in him, honour him, support him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him it is they who will be successful.”

(Al-A‘raf, 7:157).

This verse beautifully summarises the Islamic perspective on human rights: it emphasises liberating the human being from the chains of servitude to worldly powers and from intellectual and material subjugation. Instead, it guides humanity toward freedom in thought, living, and livelihood, all by following the divine path laid out in the Quran and the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This framework inherently affirms the sanctity and respect of human rights. In fact, some scholars, such as Husayn (2015), have argued that in Islam, human rights and freedoms rise to the level of necessities (daruriyyat) rather than merely being seen as optional entitlements. The Quranic verses that follow further clarify and detail these fundamental rights.

### **I. Freedom of Belief: Allah says:**

“So We said, ‘O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.’”

(Ta Ha, 20:117).

This verse shows that Allah made Adam fully aware of Satan’s enmity but ultimately left Adam free to choose how to act, illustrating the principle of freedom in matters where humans are granted choice. The same principle extends to all people: in those areas where Allah has left matters open, every individual has the freedom to either succeed through righteousness or to fail by neglect. As Allah says:

“By the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness! He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it.”

(Ash-Shams, 91:7–10).

“Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.”

(Al-Insan, 76:3).

Further, Allah instructs the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

“So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller.”

(Al-Ghashiyah, 88:21–22)

This verse underscores that the Prophet’s role is to convey the message and advise, not to compel or coerce, reflecting the Islamic emphasis on sincere faith chosen freely, not imposed by force.

### **II. Freedom of Expression: Allah says:**

“The Most Merciful taught the Quran, created man, [and] taught him clear expression.”

(Ar-Rahman, 55:1–4).

“Did We not make for him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two ways [of good and evil]?”

(Al-Balad, 90:8–10).

These verses illustrate that Allah endowed human beings with faculties and capacities to articulate, express opinions, and communicate freely—without coercion or suppression. Likewise, Allah says:

“This day I have perfected for you your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (

Al-Ma’idah, 5:3).

Islam, being the final and complete divine message, was sent as a mercy to humanity: to reinforce human dignity, liberate them from the shackles of servitude to others, and affirm the value of freedom of thought and expression.

The Quranic framework for affirming human rights fundamentally differs from secular approaches, which, despite relentless efforts under the banner of HD worldwide, have often led to dead ends and disappointing outcomes. Even in the most advanced countries, the actual state of human rights remains deeply flawed. In contrast, Islamic civilization historically reached impressive levels of development, refinement, and humanity through its commitment to the balanced guidance of the shari‘ah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).

## CONCLUSION

This article has explored how the maqasid (higher objectives) of the Quran offer a holistic vision of HD that harmonizes faith, ethics, knowledge, freedom, and social justice. Scholars such as Ibn ‘Ashur, Riḍa, al-Qarāḍawi, and al-‘Alwani have shown that these objectives encompass correcting belief, refining character, promoting knowledge and rational thought, protecting dignity and rights, and building a just, cohesive society. Central to this vision is the Quranic concept of khilafah: humanity’s role as God’s stewards on earth. This role calls for responsible use of resources, pursuit of knowledge, and upholding justice not merely for personal benefit but for the welfare of society. Quranic teachings further emphasize protecting life and intellect, ensuring equitable access to resources, and empowering human potential. Unlike development models limited to material growth, the Quranic maqasid offer a balanced and deeply humane framework, reminding us that authentic progress is achieved through nurturing the whole person and community, anchored in divine guidance and moral responsibility. Today, this vision remains profoundly relevant for building a society rooted in justice, compassion, and purpose.

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