



مجمع علماء كرنال

POSITION PAPER # 12

COVID-19 AND THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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ABOUT THE MAJLIS UL ULAMAA (MAJLISTT)

The Majlis ul Ulamaa is a forum to facilitate the collaboration of Islamic Scholars resident and active within Trinidad and Tobago. It seeks to define the authentic Islamic position as it relates to Islam and the Muslim community of the country, considering the various scholastic positions and schools of law. To this end, it deliberates on issues of importance, and defines the Islamic position. The due process is meticulous, spanning the issuing of a draft position paper, inviting stakeholders and public comment and consultations before a final position is issued.

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COVID-19 & The Muslim Community **of Trinidad and Tobago**

Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020¹. This follows on its earlier categorization of COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020.

This is based on the observation that “[t]here are now more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people have lost their lives... [i]n the days and weeks ahead, we expect to see the number of cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries climb even higher.” The WHO Director-General has expressed deep concern by “**the alarming levels of spread and severity**, and by the alarming levels of inaction.”

On March 12th, Trinidad and Tobago declared its first confirmed case of COVID-19. Based on this, the Minister of Health has made recommendations to all institutions and groups within society (religious groups were specifically mentioned), with the underlying premise that prevention of contracting the virus is better than cure.

There are a number of sources of advice that are given from the global bodies that help to better understand the pandemic and how we should treat with it, at the institutional and individual levels (See Appendix 1 for key links).

1. Matters of Muslim Attitudes and Responses to the Virus and Those Afflicted

1.1 Plague in the Land

Majlitt has noted some persons classify the pandemic as a trial from Almighty Allah, others see it as a punishment and retribution for societies’ banning of the niqab or otherwise evil ways. This is perhaps based on the hadith in which we are told:

Usaamah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “The plague is a calamity (or a punishment) that was sent upon the Children of Israel, or upon those who came before you. If you hear of it in some land, do not go there, and if it breaks out in a land where you are, do not leave, fleeing from it.”

A number of persons have suggested that the outbreak is a result of the deliberate machinations of select powers to infect the global population, and that we should not succumb to such

¹ <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

conspiracies, but rather assert our faith in Almighty Allah. Whether it is a conspiracy or not, how it started or who is behind it, is not the question of focus – Almighty Allah knows best. The Majlis is dealing with the situation as is – there is a viral infection with rapid rates of spread and severe health effects to the population, and there are associated risks to which Muslims are exposed.

Muslims should remember that afflictions are not restricted to only the transgressors, or that only believers would be spared. Rather, everyone is affected, as guided in the hadith:

Ibn Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “When Allah intends to punish a people, the punishment afflicts everyone among them. Then, they are resurrected according to their deeds.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

1.2 How to React on the Outbreak of Plague

Majlis notes there are ahadith that speak to **how we should respond to outbreaks of plagues** in a land:

‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Awf (may Allah be pleased with him) reported, “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) say: “If you hear that it (the plague) is in a land, do not go there, and if it breaks out in a land where you are, do not leave, fleeing from it”.” (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim)

Majlis notes that scholars have agreed that it is permissible to leave for work and other purposes, apart from fleeing from it.

Majlis notes as well that **isolation or quarantine is permissible**, within ahadith.

*Abu Salamah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**There is no infection** (without the decree of Allah). **Do not mix the sick with the healthy.**” (Sahih Muslim)*

Outbreak of any epidemic in a land is **not something we should be careless about**, or treat with disregard, nor be nonchalant about. We are told in the Hadith to take precautions:

*Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, “O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?” The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**Tie her and trust in Allah.**” (Al-Tirmidhi)*

If you are certain that you are infected, you should self-isolate or not interact with others.

1.3 Local Response to Outbreak

Nationally, there are key responses to consider in suspected cases of this affliction. Persons experiencing symptoms consistent with Covid-19, or suspect that they may have been infected, should follow the instructions given by the authorities.

Otherwise, the tendency among countries coping with the pandemic has been for increasingly stringent regulations to be put in place, limiting everyday activities and conveniences of the people. These are being done to contain the spread and reduce the load placed on national healthcare systems. Majlistt asks that all Muslims comply with these measures imposed by authorities and obey the law of the land as long as you are not commanded to disobey Almighty Allah.

1.4 Panicked Responses

Avoid Panic

Majlistt observes that from international media reports the tendency is for persons to panic or become hyper-concerned or even overwhelmed by reports of outbreaks of epidemics in a land, or based on the number of restrictions imposed as a result. We want to remind everyone that Almighty Allah tells us:

1. We will be tried

“And verily We shall try you with something of fear, and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crop; but give glad tidings to the patient” (Quran 2:155)

2. We will not be given more than we can bear

“Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope” (Quran 2:286)

3. With difficulty comes ease

“So Verily, with difficulty there is ease. Verily, with difficulty there is ease.” (Quran 94:5-6)

We are consoled and guided in ahadith of the fact that if we die as a result, we will die as martyrs, Insha Allah.

Hazrat Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that she asked the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), about plagues and he said, “It is a punishment that Allah sends upon whoever he wills, but Allah has made it a mercy for the believers. Any servant who resides in a land afflicted by plague, remaining patient and hoping for reward from Allah, knowing that nothing will befall him but what Allah has decreed, he will be given the reward of a martyr.” (Sahih Bukhari)

“The martyrs are of five kinds; those who pass away due to plague, stomach illness, drowning, being crushed and those who are martyred in the way of Allah.” (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim)

Verifying News

It is also a tendency, in this age of interconnected media, that messages would abound and be shared to individuals and groups. Given the propensity of some persons to report fake news or otherwise source questionable content, we urge all Muslims thus:

- Muslims should not be the originator of **false narratives and false content**. The Quran tells us:

“O you who believe! Keep your duty to God and fear Him, and speak (always) the truth.” (Quran 33:70)

- Muslims should **show restraint in sharing unverified information**, not from official sources, or presented in absence of knowing the originator of the content. We are instructed in the Quran:

“O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.” (Quran 49:6)

1.5 Panicked Buying, Hoarding and Price Gouging

Majlis also notes the tendency for persons to **panic buy** with various essential items for ongoing sanitization or for the event of possible isolation. Majlistt wishes to advise the public that it is discouraged in Islam to buy something needed by the community in amounts that cause harm to others.”.

Hoarding for Reselling

For persons who purchase in bulk with the intention to sell at a higher price in times of scarce supply, Majlis wishes to remind everyone that ahadith say:

“Ma'mar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) as saying: He who hoards is a sinner. It was said to Sa'id (b. al-Musayyib): You also hoard. Sa'id said: Ma'mar who narrated this hadith also hoarded.” Sahih Muslim

“Ma'mar b. Abdullah reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: No one hoards but the sinner.” (Sahih Muslim)

With reference to raising prices for commodities in times of high demand, we recognize that this depends on a number of variables that can affect vendor and other sourcing, transportation and stocking costs and charges, and vendors may be required to adjust prices.

However, we wish to also acknowledge that according to Islam, **practices such as price gouging and withholding products to raise prices** are disallowed in Islam.

2. Questions, Guidance and Protocols on Coping with the Virus, Practices and Restrictions

2.1 Proper Hygiene

We note there are numerous ahadith that pertain to ***proper health and hygiene***, which we should follow at all times, not only in times of epidemics. We note the following from Quran and ahadith:

“Verily Allah loves those who repent and those keep themselves pure and clean.” (Quran 2:222)

Abu Malik Al-Ash`ari (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Purity is half of Iman (faith).” (Sahih Muslim)

A`ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “The miswak (a twig used for tooth brushing) cleanses and purifies the mouth and pleases the Lord.” (An-Nasa`i)

Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, “Were it not that I might overburden my followers, I would have commanded them to use the miswak before every prayer.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

A`ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported: “The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), if he wanted to eat or drink, he would first wash his hands and then eat or drink.” (Sunan al-Nasā`ī)

Usamah ibn Sharik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: I came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions were sitting as (quiet as) if they had birds on their heads. I saluted and sat down. The desert Arabs then came from here and there. They asked: Messenger of Allah, should we make use of medical treatment? He replied: “Make use of medical treatment, for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, with the exception of one disease, namely old age.” (Abu Dawud)

Muslims are encouraged to make themselves familiar with the instructions and guidelines given in Islam on matters of everyday hygiene and health.

2.2 On the Consumption or Use of Substances to Combat the Virus

There have been questions regarding the use of alcohol-based sanitizers (mostly isopropyl and ethyl). In particular, questions were asked regarding (1) whether it is acceptable to use these substances, and (2) whether use of it breaks the wudhu.

Such sanitizers are classed as *najasa* (impurity) according to Shafi'i, Hanbali and Maliki schools of Fiqh, but according to the Hanafi school use of such substances are permissible to preserve one's health. It must be noted that this is in the absence of more sanitary means (such as washing hands with soap and water), and those means are preferred.

There has been on social media and in interpersonal interaction many mentions of **various preventative measures and cures within Islam** that are espoused for affliction. These include substances that persons can consume to prevent or cure afflictions. We note from ahadith the following:

“We send down (stage by stage) in the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe: to the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss.” (Quran 17:82)

“And thy Lord taught the Bee to build its cells in hills, on trees, and in (men's) habitations; Then to eat of all the produce (of the earth), and find with skill the spacious paths of its Lord: there issues from within their bodies a drink of varying colours, wherein is healing for men: verily in this is a Sign for those who give thought.” (Quran 16:68-69)

Jabir reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), said, “Every disease has a cure. If a cure is applied to the disease, it is relieved by the permission of Allah Almighty.” Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim

Aby Hurayra (r.a.) reported that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is reported to have said, “Utilize the black seed for without a doubt, it is a cure for all sickness aside from death.”

That having been said, **Muslims should ensure that they comply with proper practices to not infect others, or become infected.**

2.3 Public Gatherings

Jumu'ah salaah is *fard* (obligatory) and emphasized in Islam. It is not only a source of increased blessings and a cure in this life and the next, but it is also a signal and symbol of Islam. Congregational prayer for 5-times daily salaah is *wajib* (essential).

Health authorities managing the virus and its spread have provided guidance and recommendations that ***“all non-essential gatherings should be postponed, rescheduled or cancelled.”***

This has raised a number of inquiries on whether this should affect Jumu’ah and other functions within the community, as well as Islamic classes etc. Of particular note were the questions of (1) whether it is permissible for a masjid or Imam to suspend Jumu’ah salaah, and (2) whether someone who is sick or, in this case, exhibiting the symptoms of infection, can miss the Jumu’ah salaah.

(1) Praying Jumu’ah

At this time, gatherings of 10 persons or over are to be avoided. We also note there is no legal obligation to not assemble, but it is advised by the authorities.

In discussion among the Majlistt, the question was put to the Shariah Council “Should mosques continue to have Jumu’ah salaah where there is no legal obligation to not have it?”

In response to this question, **the majority of members of the council were of the position that there should be Jumu’ah.** Of these, there were *some who said yes but with restrictions imposed*, including the condition that each jamaat should not exceed the recommended number of persons as advised by the Health authorities. Other members of the council are of the position that **congregations of any size exposes persons to risk of becoming infected, and on that basis there should be no Jumu’ah salaah.**

If someone is fearful that attending Jumu’ah will be harmful to their life or health on the basis some existing condition, then that person is not obligated to attend Jumu’ah.

If masjids are not required to close by authorities, or its choice to have Jumu’ah is optional or discretionary, then **Jumu’ah should be maintained**, but again **this should be at the discretion of the Imam of the community itself.**

[UPDATE 19 MARCH, 2020:

FURTHER TO THE PAPER RELEASED ON 18 MARCH, 2020, AND BASED ON ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION, THE MAJORITY OF SCHOLARS OF MAJLISTT ARE OF THE POSITION THAT JUMU’AH SALAAT SHOULD BE SUSPENDED FOR 2 WEEKS FOR ALL MOSQUES THROUGHOUT TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.

AT THAT TIME, THE POSITION WOULD BE REASSESSED.

WE FURTHER WISH TO ADVISE THAT MOSQUES SHOULD BE CLOSED TO PUBLIC GATHERINGS – THIS INCLUDES FOR 5 DAILY SALAAT. DURING THAT TIME PERIOD, REGARDING JUMU’AH SALAAT, PERSONS ARE ALLOWED AND ENCOURAGED TO PERFORM THEIR SALAATUL ZUHR AT THEIR HOMES.]

We add that **should the authorities instruct that no public gatherings are allowed**, and that all persons should remain in their homes or in isolation, **Muslims should comply with the instructions, and therefore there would be no Jumu'ah salaah**.

With regard to praying in your home instead of attending the mosque, we note there is precedent for this in ahadith.

'Abdullah bin Al-Harith narrated: Once on a rainy muddy day, Ibn 'Abbas delivered a sermon in our presence and when the Mu'adhdhin pronounced the Adhan and said, "Haiya ala-s-sala(t) (come for the prayer)" Ibn 'Abbas ordered him to say 'Pray at your homes.' The people began to look at each other (surprisingly). Ibn 'Abbas said. "It was done by one who was much better than I (i.e. the Prophet or his Mu'adhdhin), and it is a license.' (Sahih Bukhari)

Nafi narrated: Once in a cold night, Ibn 'Umar pronounced the Adhan for the prayer at Dajnan (the name of a mountain) and then said, "Pray at your homes", and informed us that Allah's Apostle used to tell the Mu'adhdhin to pronounce Adhan and say, "Pray at your homes" at the end of the Adhan on a rainy or a very cold night during the journey." (Sahih Bukhari)

On this basis, Majlistt wishes to state clearly that it is permissible for persons to pray salaah at their homes instead of congregating in the mosque. Related to this, if Masajid choose to conduct salaatul Jumu'ah, we note the concerns regarding the rate at which the COVID-19 is being spread, and effective habits that persons should adopt to prevent becoming infected (CDC²). In this regard, Majlistt wishes to highlight the following regarding **Jumu'ah, Janaza and General Interaction** among the Muslim community, which we urge everyone to consider:

- It is customary and in some cases Sunnah, for Muslims to **shake hands** when greeting each other. In protecting ourselves from becoming infected, we are advised to stop handshakes. In such a case, we can offer salaams without physical contact. If you do shake hands, we should wash our hands after doing so.
- In **making wudhu** we recommend that we should thoroughly wash our hands with soap. To this end, Masjids should ensure that soap is readily available for persons making wudhu.
- Masajid should ensure that the masajid are well-ventilated in the times persons are gathered.
- The **length of the khuthba** varies from masjid to masjid. This bears the risk of exposing persons for extended periods of time to potential infection. The Imam should keep the kuthba and the salaah brief without compromising the quality of prayer, so that the risk to persons is minimized.

² Centre for Disease Control, US Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

- When **making sajda**, there is the risk that someone who is infected may have left germs where sajda is being made. Persons fearing this risk are encouraged to have a cloth or other clean / sanitized material spread at the point where sajdah is going to be made.
- It is also advisable and a healthy practice for all persons to **wash hands thoroughly after exiting the masjid**, before leaving the compound.

(2) Regarding other functions, activities and programs:

Majlistt notes that many institutions have already taken the initiative to postpone, cancel or otherwise discourage events, classes and other activities. There are also a number of persons who have expressed the preference for business as usual, based on faith that Almighty Allah will take care of our affairs. Some are of the view that these are the times where we should increase our worship and faith in Almighty Allah, and to this end the Jamaats and other Islamic classes should continue and even be more encouraged within the community.

Majlistt endorses the sentiment that this is an opportunity to strengthen faith and resolve in Almighty Allah. However, under the core issue of minimizing the risk of spread and ‘flattening the curve’, gatherings of persons should not be encouraged beyond what is necessary. In this case, if any Jamaat or institution wants to use available technology to disseminate messages or learnings remotely, then this is up to them. However, **if they wish to do so in face-to-face gatherings, Majlistt we recommend that this should be discouraged**, and urge persons to desist from such.

(3) Should persons who are sick be exempted or excluded from attending congregational prayers

Persons who are sick should not attend the masjid. We are told in the Quran and in Hadith:

“No blame or sin is there upon the blind, nor is there blame or sin upon the lame, nor is there blame or sin upon the sick” [Quran 48:17]

Ibn Mas’ood (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “There was a time when no one stayed away from the prayer except a hypocrite who was known for his hypocrisy or one who was sick...” (Sahih Muslim)

If persons are sick or develop symptoms and are in a masjid with others to pray salaah, they should stand at the back of the jamaat, and downwind from others, so as to not spread the infection. All persons should treat with any actions (coughing, sneezing or otherwise) that would result in their bodily fluid being transmitted to others, in ways that are advised by health authorities.

Majlitt acknowledges fatawa and other advice that have addressed these concerns, including the following from the Committee of Major Scholars – Saudi Arabia (March 12, 2020)³

The Committee of Major Scholars has stated the following regarding the Coronavirus & attending the Jumu'ah & Daily Prayers.

1/ It is impermissible for the one who has been afflicted with the virus to attend the Jumu'ah or prayers in the masjid.

2/ Whomsoever the specialists have determined requires to isolate himself then it is impermissible for him to attend the Jumu'ah & the prayers; rather he must isolate therefore and pray at home or at the place of isolation.

3/ Whomsoever fears he may be harmed (i.e. the vulnerable at risk from the virus; the elderly or perhaps those with underlying health concerns etc) or he may harm others then it is allowed for him to miss the Jumu'ah & prayers at the masjid and pray at home instead.

In all circumstances, those that do not attend a Jumu'ah prayer then they pray 4 raka'at Dhuhur instead.

2.5 Avoidance or Recovery Through Prayer

There has been on social media and in interpersonal interaction many mentions of various cures within Islam that are espoused for affliction. These include du'a that persons can make to avoid being infected, or to beseech Almighty Allah for help to overcome an affliction. We note there are many du'a from ahadith which one can recite, including the following:

- Bismillah illadhi la yadurru ma'a ismihi shay'un fi'l-ard wa la fi'l-sama' wa huwas-Samee'ul Aleem

In the name of Allah, with Whose name nothing on earth or in heaven can cause harm, and He is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

- Allahumma 'afini fi badani, allahumma 'afini fi sam'I, allahumma 'afini fi basari la ilaha illa anta

O Allah, make my body healthy. Make my hearing healthy. Make my eyesight healthy. There is no God but You.

³ <http://www.spa.gov.sa/2047028> - summary of key points courtesy @AbuMuadhTaqweem

- Allahumma inni a’udhu bika minal-barasi, wal-jununi, wal-juddhami, wa sayyi’il-asqaam
O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from leprosy, madness, elephantiasis and evil diseases
Abu-Dawud 1554

Majlistt wishes to remind everyone that Almighty Allah tells us in the Holy Quran:

“Nothing can befall us except what Allah decrees. Our Protector is He, and in Allah should the faithful place their trust.” (Quran 51:9)

Majlistt wishes that Almighty Allah protect us all and keep us in good health and Iman. Ameen

APPENDIX 1 – KEY LINKS AND INFORMATION RESOURCES ON COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions on coronaviruses (COVID-19)

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

General Tips for Preventing / Avoiding Infection

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

Advice for Individuals

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
- https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE_use-2020.1-eng.pdf
- [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts)

Advice for Institutions – Schools

- <https://www.unicef.org/reports/key-messages-and-actions-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-prevention-and-control-schools>
- <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-ifrc-unicef-and-who-issue-guidance-protect-children-and-support-safe-school>

Advice for Institutions – Workplace

- https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6

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Committee of Major Scholars (Saudi Arabia), Fatwa on Coronavirus & attending the Jumu'ah & Daily Prayers, (March 12, 2020)

Mufti Asrarul Haque, Fatwa from the Ulama Council of ASJA on COVID19 With Regards to Taking Necessary Steps Towards Protecting the Lives of Humankind in the Light of Maqasid Sharia'h, The Anjuman-Sunnatul-Jamaat Association

Muhammad Usman Madani (Mutakhassis fil Fiqh, Limbe Malawi), Fatwa on Covid-19 (Coronavirus Disease), Checked and Approved by Hazrat Maulana Mufti Abdun Nabi Hamidi (Johannesburg, South Africa), Sunday 15th March, 2020

Supreme Council of Senior Scholars, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, Pausing Friday and Congregational Prayers in order to protect people from the Coronavirus, Al-Azhar Alumni UK, Sunday March 15, 2020

Wasim Khan, Guidelines for Daily Salah and the Jumuah Salah, Darul Uloom Trinidad and Tobago Ltd.