Fatwa on Fish Eating in the Tsunami Areas

It has been brought to the attention of the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS) that a section of our Muslim brothers in the South-East Asian areas which were hit by the Tsunami disaster have refrained from eating fish from the Indian Ocean and adjacent areas. They fear that such fish might have fed on human bodies swept into the ocean.

Taking the interests of all Muslims into consideration, and in fulfilment of its duty to provide good counsel to Muslim people, pointing out to them what is acceptable in Islam and what promotes their welfare, the IUMS Secretariat contacted a number of international organizations concerned with food safety. Prominent among these were the regional offices and the headquarters of the World Health Organization, and the Food and Agriculture Organization. These contacts have confirmed to the IUMS Secretariat that thorough and comprehensive tests have been carried out on fish caught after the Tsunami disaster. All these tests confirm that such fish do not contain any harmful substances that might have been transmitted to them from anything swept into the ocean. This is also true of tuna fish, which feeds on flesh. As such, no particular health hazard results from eating such fish, and therefore eating them is perfectly permissible. Thus, the Prophet’s statement that prohibits the infliction of harm on oneself or others does not apply in this case, as no causing of harm is involved.

Nevertheless some people may still entertain some doubts about the permissibility of eating such fish. They may think that if fish feed on swept human bodies, they will be in the same position as land animals that feed on impurities, which are known in Islamic law as jallalah. But there is no reason to refrain from eating such fish on such basis. To start with, laboratory tests carried out by reliable sources prove that fish does not feed on dead bodies. Besides, the basic ruling of permissibility cannot be changed on the basis of doubt or assumption. God says in the Qur'an: “Lawful to you is all water-game, and whatever food the sea brings forth, as a provision for you and
for travellers.” (Q5: 96) He also says: “It is He who has made the sea subservient to [His laws], so that you may eat fresh meat from it.” (Q16: 14) Speaking of the sea, the Prophet says: “Its water is pure, and its dead animals are lawful.” [Related by Ahmad and Abu Dawood]

On the basis of the foregoing, the International Union for Muslim Scholars issues this fatwa for all people in the areas affected by the Tsunami disaster that it is perfectly permissible from the Islamic point of view to eat sea fish. Indeed it encourages them to do so in order to protect their health, preserve their energy so that they can carry out their duties and functions in obedience to God, and guard themselves against any disease that may affect them as a result of malnutrition, should they refrain from eating fish. They should consider sea fish as part of the sustenance God has provided for them, as it gives them what they need of proteins and energy.

It is to God alone that we pray for guidance.

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