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The Need for Vigilance Against Bogus *Fatwas*

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SYNOPSIS

The recent “fatwa” issued by the International Union of Muslim Scholars based in Qatar calling for armed jihad against Israel highlights the critical need to differentiate between legitimate religious rulings and those that are politically motivated, lacking in contextual awareness or lacking the support of recognised authority.

COMMENTARY

A recent “[fatwa](#)” issued in response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza by the Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) has garnered mixed reactions from the Muslim community worldwide. The declaration, which calls for armed jihad against Israel, is highly problematic and radical. It bypasses legitimate state authority, promotes violence, and disregards the diverse contexts in which Muslims live, especially in secular societies like Singapore. Its absolutist tone risks fuelling radicalisation and undermining social harmony.

This episode highlights the urgent need for Muslims to critically assess religious rulings and recognise signs of illegitimacy, such as political motivation, lack of contextual awareness, or absence of recognised authority.

In a secular and multireligious state like Singapore, where harmony and the rule of law are foundational, Singaporean Muslims should discern and turn to trusted local institutions for religious clarity. They should seek guidance from trusted local institutions like the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and the [Fatwa Committee](#), ensuring that religious practice remains grounded, lawful, and socially responsible.

On Fatwas and Legitimate Issuing Bodies

A fatwa (religious verdict) is a non-binding legal opinion issued by a qualified Islamic scholar, a mufti, who specialises in legal edicts in response to a specific question concerning Islamic law (*shari'a*). In Singapore, the Fatwa Committee is responsible for issuing religious rulings and fatwas. The legitimacy of a fatwa hinges on the following key factors.

- The scholar who issues the fatwa is intensely trained in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Quran, Hadith (prophetic traditions), and legal methodology (*usul al-fiqh*), often studying at established institutions like Al-Azhar University or equivalent bodies.
- The fatwa must adhere to recognised schools of Islamic thought, such as the four Sunni schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) or the Ja'fari school in Shi'a Islam, ensuring that it is grounded in tradition and scholarly consensus.
- The fatwa must be contextually appropriate, considering the case's time, place, and specific circumstances, which help to prevent misapplication or irrelevance.
- Methodological soundness is also critical as the fatwa must be derived from Islamic primary sources using accepted tools such as analogy (*qiyas*), consensus (*ijma'*), and consideration of public welfare (*maslahah*).

Additionally, a fatwa gains further legitimacy if issued or endorsed by reputable religious institutions or widely respected scholars.

Responses to the “Fatwa” by IUMS

In March 2025, the IUMS released what it called a “fatwa” in response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, declaring armed jihad against Israel as a religious obligation (*fard al-'ayn*) for all capable Muslims. It called upon Muslims and governments to engage in military, economic, and political actions to stop what it describes as a “systematic campaign of genocide” against Palestinians, accusing Israel of violating ceasefire agreements and being supported by the United States. The declaration also prohibits any form of assistance to Israel, including military, logistical, or economic support, and urges a complete blockade of the country.

The “fatwa” has elicited varied responses from countries and Islamic institutions worldwide. Egypt's official fatwa authority, known as Dar al-Ifta, which is one of the first pioneering foundations to issue fatwas throughout the Islamic world, strongly [condemned the IUMS “fatwa”](#), labelling it an “invitation for chaos” and asserting that such declarations should be the prerogative of state authorities, not independent organisations. Dar al-Ifta also declared that the “fatwa” by IUMS contradicts Sharia law and emphasised that only legitimate state leadership can declare war, cautioning against unauthorised entities issuing such calls.

In contrast, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) [expressed support for the IUMS “fatwa”](#). MUI endorsed the call for jihad against Israel, aligning with the IUMS' stance on the necessity of supporting Palestinians through

various means. The Qatari government has not stated its position on the “fatwa”, even though the IUMS is based in Qatar. Analysts interpret the government's silence as [tacit approval](#), given its historical support for the IUMS.

Navigating Islam in Singapore

Muslims around the world continue to face challenges in navigating the practice of Islam in today's digital age, where information, both accurate and misleading, can spread instantaneously. The recent declaration, mischaracterised as a fatwa, exemplifies this concern.

Fatwas should only be issued by legitimate, recognised local religious authorities with the requisite theological qualifications and a deep understanding of their community's unique cultural and socio-political context. A fatwa is not merely a religious opinion; it carries moral weight and can shape public behaviour, attitudes, and policies. When transnational or ideologically driven entities such as the IUMS issue fatwas without regard for local conditions and national sovereignty, they risk disconnecting themselves from reality, inflaming tensions, provoking radical thinking, and undermining the rule of law.

Contextualisation is key in Islamic jurisprudence – scholars must consider time, place, and societal conditions when issuing rulings. In Singapore, MUIS and the Fatwa Committee, chaired by the Mufti, are the only recognised authorities empowered to issue fatwas.

In response to IUMS' “fatwa” calling for armed jihad against Israel, the Mufti of Singapore did not endorse or recognise it as the declaration did not align with the nation's laws, security, and multireligious fabric. Fatwas imposed abroad can sow discord and radicalise communities if they disregard local socio-cultural and political contexts.

Singaporean Muslims are encouraged to seek guidance from local religious authorities like MUIS and the Fatwa Committee and counsel from accredited *asatizah* (religious teachers), especially when navigating complex transnational issues or encountering fatwas issued by international bodies. Local scholars are best equipped to interpret Islamic rulings in ways that align with Singapore's legal framework, social harmony, and multicultural values. Turning to recognised local institutions ensures that religious guidance is both contextually sound and responsible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the IUMS declaration serves as a timely reminder of the dangers posed by decontextualised and politically charged religious rulings. In an age of transnational ideologies and online influence, it is more important than ever for Muslims, particularly in secular, multireligious societies like Singapore, to exercise discernment in religious matters. By turning to legitimate local authorities and practising their religion in contextually relevant guidance, Singaporean Muslims can uphold both their faith and their role as responsible members of a diverse society.

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