

## ROLE OF VETERINARY SERVICES AND ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN IMPROVING ANIMAL WELFARE AT SLAUGHTER

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Islam provides considerable support for the importance of animal welfare. There is a rich tradition of the Prophet Mohammad's (*pbuh*) concern for animals to be found in the Hadith and Sunna. In particular, the Qur'an is explicit, with regard to the use of animals by humans. A closer look at the Qur'an and tradition reveals teachings of kindness and concern for animals. Islamic Law calls for the protection of animals against cruel practices and makes specific provisions for humane slaughter. These provisions are compatible with OIE *Terrestrial Code* Chapter 7.5 on the Slaughter of animals.

Many current practices in abattoirs are not in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an, nor with the OIE animal welfare standards, and may result in great cruelty to animals. Needless suffering is inflicted on animals that are transported in overcrowded, ill-ventilated, trucks, especially in hot, humid weather. Harsh conditions also occur at slaughter plants. Animals are held in primitive facilities without shade, and are restrained on short tethers. At the point of slaughter, animals are often struck and beaten to make them enter the slaughter facilities.

Abattoirs should be equipped with the facilities required for the correct application of animal welfare standards, including unloading facilities, slaughtering boxes, and well-trained personnel to correctly implement correct Halal slaughter.

Many Muslims and Islamic religious leaders are not aware of the cruelty that is routinely inflicted on animals at pre-slaughter and slaughter in many Islamic countries. There is an urgent need to sensitise all Muslims to the teachings on animal welfare in the Qur'an and the Hadiths. This needs to be done by intervention at the highest level by Religious bodies and organisations, which could be most effective in giving rulings (fatwas) on this issue. As recommended by the OIE, National Veterinary Services and Religious Authorities should enter into dialogue with the objective of raising awareness of the importance of animal welfare and the need to reduce animal suffering globally.

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