

Belfast Riots: Another Symptom of a Divisive and Failing Political Order

News:

Recent riots in Belfast have seen attacks on migrants, widespread disorder, and heightened tensions between communities. The unrest was reportedly sparked by a knife attack in which a Sudanese migrant was accused of seriously injuring a local man, an incident that understandably generated shock, concern, and anger amongst many residents. In the days that followed, protests escalated into violence, with migrants and ethnic minorities becoming the target of attacks, reigniting debates around immigration, community relations, and social cohesion within Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom.

Comment:

The knife attack that ignited these events was a serious and disturbing crime that should be unequivocally condemned. Any victim of violence deserves justice, and those responsible must be held fully accountable for their actions. However, the actions of an individual should never be used to justify hostility towards entire communities, nor should they become a pretext for attacks on innocent migrants, refugees, or ethnic minorities who bear no responsibility for the crime. The speed with which public anger over one incident transformed into broader anti-immigrant violence demonstrates how deep-rooted social divisions can quickly be exploited and inflamed.

The recent scenes witnessed in Belfast should not be viewed as isolated incidents or merely the actions of a small number of extremists. Rather, they are symptomatic of deeper divisions that exist within Western societies and the political systems that govern them.

Across Europe, anti-immigrant rhetoric has become increasingly normalised within mainstream political discourse. Migrants and minorities are frequently portrayed as a burden on public services, a threat to national identity, or the cause of economic hardship. During periods of social and economic difficulty, vulnerable communities often become convenient scapegoats, allowing political leaders to redirect public frustration away from their own failures.

In reality, migrants did not create housing shortages, rising living costs, struggling healthcare systems, or widening economic inequality. These problems are the result of political and economic decisions made over many years. Yet rather than addressing the structural causes of these crises, many politicians continue to exploit public concerns by directing blame towards minorities and newcomers.

At the heart of this problem lies the ideology of nationalism. Modern nation-states encourage people to define themselves primarily through nationality, ethnicity, and national interests. Such a worldview inevitably creates an "us and them" mentality, making those perceived as outsiders vulnerable to suspicion, resentment, and hostility whenever society faces challenges.

History repeatedly demonstrates the consequences of this thinking. From colonialism and slavery to ethnic discrimination and anti-immigrant hostility, nationalism has consistently fostered division and conflict. While governments speak of equality and

diversity, they continue to promote national identities that separate people into competing groups and encourage individuals to judge one another through the lens of race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Islam presents a fundamentally different vision.

More than fourteen centuries ago, Islam confronted and eradicated the tribal and racial prejudices that dominated Arabia. The Qur'an declared: **﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾** **“O mankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you 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 of you”** [Al-Hujurat: 13].

Islam rejects racism, nationalism, tribalism, and all forms of superiority based upon race, ethnicity, language, or nationality. The Messenger Muhammad (saw) said: **«لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ دَعَا إِلَىٰ عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ قَاتَلَ عَلَىٰ عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ مَاتَ عَلَىٰ عَصَبِيَّةٍ»** **“He is not one of us who calls to tribalism, fights for tribalism, or dies upon tribalism.”**

Rather than bonding people through race or nationality, Islam bonds people through shared values, justice, and accountability before Allah (swt). Throughout its history, the Islamic civilisation united people of diverse ethnicities, languages, and backgrounds within one state, where individuals were judged according to their conduct and character rather than the colour of their skin or their place of birth.

The scenes witnessed in Belfast should therefore serve as a reminder that racism and xenophobia cannot be fully addressed while maintaining the very ideological foundations that generate them. As long as societies continue to be built upon nationalism, identity politics, and the pursuit of political advantage, such divisions will continue to resurface in different forms.

Real change requires more than condemning violence after it occurs. It requires challenging the ideas and systems that cultivate division in the first place. Islam offers an alternative model—one that uproots racism at its source, rejects all forms of ethnic and national superiority, and establishes justice and dignity for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, or origin.

The world does not need more slogans about tolerance while preserving the causes of division. It needs a comprehensive system that removes those causes altogether. This is the vision that Islam provides.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Yasmin Malik

Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir