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THE CONCEPT OF PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES UNDER THE 16TH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL IN THE LIGHT OF THE SEERAH OF THE HOLY PROPHET MUHAMMAD (P.B.U.H.)

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
SDG 16; Seerah; peaceful and inclusive societies; Islamic governance; shura; maqasid al-Shariah	Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) commits the international community to building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, yet its secular liberal idiom has struggled to secure durable legitimacy across the fifty-seven member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. This article addresses that legitimacy gap by asking whether the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.)—the authenticated historical record of his prophetic mission—provides an indigenous, theologically grounded framework for the values SDG 16 seeks to institutionalise. Drawing on Qur'anic exegesis, authenticated Hadith literature, and classical and contemporary Seerah scholarship, the article traces the prophetic model of peacebuilding through the Hilf al-Fudul, the Hijrah, the Constitution of Medina, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, the general amnesty at the conquest of Mecca, and the Farewell Sermon, and the prophetic model of inclusive governance through the shura tradition, the covenants extended to the Jewish tribes of Medina and the Christian community of Najran, the transformation of women's political, economic, and legal status, and the redistributive institutions of zakat, waqf, and hisbah. A target-by-target comparison against SDG 16's ten substantive targets finds strong convergence across the majority of the Goal's commitments—reduction of violence, access to justice, accountable institutions, participatory governance, and protection of fundamental freedoms—alongside genuine and unresolved divergences concerning the ultimate source of normative authority, the relationship between religious law and public governance, and the tension between formal equality and differentiated rights. The article argues that these convergences and divergences together position the prophetic model as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, SDG 16's universal framework, offering Muslim-majority states an authentically grounded vocabulary through which to pursue the Goal's objectives. It concludes with policy-relevant recommendations organised around the constitutional entrenchment of shura, the revival of hisbah-based regulatory accountability, and the institutionalisation of zakat and waqf as transparent instruments of economic inclusion.
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Introduction

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015 established seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, of which the sixteenth—"Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions"—occupies a distinctive and foundational position.¹ SDG 16 commits states to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.² Because the achievement of every other development goal depends on the governance conditions SDG 16 addresses, it has been described as the "enabling goal" of the entire 2030 Agenda.³ Yet SDG 16 also remains among the Agenda's most underperforming and contested goals, and its conceptual vocabulary—drawn substantially from Enlightenment political philosophy, liberal peacebuilding theory, and the secular human-rights tradition—has struggled to achieve the same cultural resonance in Muslim-majority contexts that it enjoys in the constitutional democracies from which much of its theoretical apparatus derives.

This article addresses that resonance gap by examining whether the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.)—understood in the Islamic tradition as *uswa hasana*, a beautiful and normatively binding model of conduct (Qur'an 33:21)—supplies an indigenous governance framework capable of grounding SDG 16's objectives in terms that are authoritative, historically documented, and religiously legitimate for the world's 1.8 billion Muslims.⁴ The argument proceeds in three movements. It first establishes the theological foundations of peace, justice, and social inclusion in the Qur'an and authenticated Hadith, demonstrating that these are not peripheral ethical preferences but central divine commands. It then examines how the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) translated these commands into concrete historical practice across the peacebuilding episodes of the Seerah—the Constitution of Medina, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, the conquest of Mecca, and the Farewell Sermon—and the inclusive-governance episodes concerning consultation, minority rights, gender, and economic justice. Finally, it undertakes a systematic comparison between this prophetic model and SDG 16's ten substantive targets, identifying both the considerable convergences between the two frameworks and the genuine points of divergence that require honest scholarly engagement rather than premature harmonisation.

The analysis is not an exercise in nostalgic reconstruction. It does not propose that seventh-century Medinan institutions be replicated in their historical form, nor does it claim that Islam and SDG 16 are simply identical projects wearing different vocabularies. It argues instead, on the basis of documented textual and historical evidence, that the prophetic governance model constitutes a coherent, authenticated, and practically demonstrated indigenous resource that can complement

¹United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (New York: United Nations, 2015), 2.

²United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 25.

³Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); S. Fukuda-Parr, "From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals," *Gender and Development* 24, no. 1 (2016).

⁴J. L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

SDG 16's universal standards with theological grounding, institutional precedent, and motivational depth that a purely secular development framework cannot supply.

Sustainable Development Goal 16: Conceptual Architecture

SDG 16 is organised around three interrelated pillars—peace, justice, and strong institutions—operationalised through ten substantive targets.⁵ Target 16.1 calls for the significant reduction of all forms of violence; Target 16.2 for the ending of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children; Target 16.3 for the promotion of the rule of law and equal access to justice; Target 16.4 for the reduction of illicit financial flows and organised crime; Target 16.5 for the substantial reduction of corruption and bribery; Target 16.6 for the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions; Target 16.7 for inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making; Target 16.8 for the strengthened participation of developing countries in global governance; Target 16.9 for the provision of legal identity for all; and Target 16.10 for public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms.⁶ Global monitoring consistently identifies SDG 16 as the goal furthest from its 2030 targets, with armed conflict, institutional corruption, and systemic exclusion continuing to affect hundreds of millions of people, and with Muslim-majority states disproportionately represented among the world's least peaceful and most fragile political contexts.⁷ It is against this empirical backdrop that the present article's turn to the Seerah acquires its practical, and not merely academic, significance.

Theological Foundations: Peace, Justice, and Inclusion in the Qur'an and Sunnah

Peace (Salam) as a Divine Attribute and Communal Imperative

The Arabic term *salam* is theologically dense: its root connects Islam (submission to God), Muslim (one who submits), and *salam* (peace) in a single semantic family that orients the believer's relationship to God, self, and community.⁸ Al-Salam is one of the ninety-nine divine names, and the Qur'an identifies paradise itself as Dar al-Salam, the Abode of Peace (Qur'an 10:25). Peace in the Islamic worldview is therefore not merely a political condition to be negotiated but an attribute of divine being that human social arrangements are called to reflect. This intrinsic valuation of peace is reinforced by the Qur'an's unconditional instruction regarding conflict resolution:

"And if they incline to peace, then incline to it also and rely upon Allah." (Qur'an 8:61)

A complementary verse in Surah Al-Hujurat links peace inseparably to justice, commanding that disputes between believing factions be resolved through settlement conducted "in justice" (*bi'l-*

⁵United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, 25–26.

⁶United Nations Statistics Division, *SDG Indicators Global Database* (New York: United Nations, 2024).

⁷United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024* (New York: United Nations Statistics Division, 2024); Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2023* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023).

⁸Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004).

gist) (Qur'an 49:9)—a pairing that anticipates SDG 16's own conjunction of peaceful and just societies. The Qur'an's opposite category to peace, *fasad* (corruption, disorder, "spreading mischief on earth"), is condemned in the strongest terms available to the text, culminating in the declaration that killing one innocent soul is equivalent to killing all of humanity (Qur'an 5:32)—a verse frequently invoked in contemporary Islamic discourse on non-violence and a theological anchor for Target 16.1's commitment to reducing all forms of violence.⁹

The authenticated Hadith literature extends this Qur'anic foundation into concrete prophetic instruction. Asked about the best qualities of Islam, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) replied that they include "feeding people and spreading peace (*salam*) to those you know and those you do not know."¹⁰ The universalism of this instruction—extending peaceful conduct beyond the boundaries of acquaintance or co-religion—directly anticipates SDG 16's vision of peaceful societies as inclusive of all persons. Equally foundational is the legal maxim *la darar wa la dirar* ("there shall be no harm and no reciprocation of harm"), one of the five foundational maxims of Islamic jurisprudence, from which the prohibition of violence, exploitation, and oppression is derived as a matter of law rather than mere exhortation.¹¹

Justice ('Adl, Qist, Mizan, Ihsan)

The Qur'an conveys justice through a cluster of related terms. 'Adl denotes equity and proper balance; *qist* denotes fairness and proportionality; *mizan* denotes the cosmic scale by which God orders creation and by which human conduct will ultimately be judged; and *ihsan* denotes the excellence and beneficence that exceeds strict justice.¹² The imperative character of 'adl is unconditional:

"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives." (Qur'an 4:135)

Verse 5:8 extends this radical impartiality to relations with those one dislikes: "do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness." Because Qur'anic justice is grounded in the cosmic order rather than social convention, Maududi argued that it admits no legitimate political order built upon injustice, irrespective of that order's procedural legitimacy by other standards.¹³ The Hadith tradition personalises this impartiality with maximum force: asked to intercede for a woman of a prominent Meccan clan convicted of theft, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) responded, "By Allah, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would cut off her hand."¹⁴ This declaration—invoking his own daughter as the

⁹M. T. Qadri, *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings* (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran International, 2010).

¹⁰Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 12; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 39.

¹¹Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2340; cited in Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹²S. A. A. Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, trans. K. Ahmad (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980 [1940]).

¹³Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*.

¹⁴Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6788; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 1688.

hypothetical subject of legal sanction—establishes equality before the law as a theological requirement rather than a discretionary courtesy, directly grounding SDG 16's Target 16.3 commitment to equal access to justice.

Human Dignity, Equality, and the Rights of the Vulnerable

The theological foundation for inclusive societies rests on the Qur'anic concept of *karamah*, human dignity, conferred on "the children of Adam" without qualification of faith, ethnicity, or social status:

"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with definite preference." (Qur'an 17:70)

Because this honour is attributed directly to divine will rather than to human achievement or convention, Abou El Fadl argues that it constitutes the foundational premise from which the entire Islamic rights tradition is derived: social arrangements that systematically dishonour particular groups violate not merely human convention but divine order.¹⁵ Surah Al-Hujurat extends this dignity into an explicit statement of human equality across ethnic and tribal lines, addressed to "mankind" rather than to believers alone:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." (Qur'an 49:13)

The Qur'an further establishes freedom of conscience as an inter-communal principle—"There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256)—and enumerates specific obligations toward orphans, the poor, travellers, and the enslaved (Qur'an 76:8–9; 17:34). The Hadith corpus reinforces this with the Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) organic metaphor for communal solidarity: "The example of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body: when any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever."¹⁶ These theological commitments—dignity, equality, freedom of conscience, and protection of the vulnerable—together supply the normative architecture within which the Seerah's historical episodes, examined below, acquire their institutional expression.

Peaceful Societies in the Light of the Seerah

The Pre-Islamic Context and the Prophet's Early Peacebuilding: Hilf al-Fudul

Pre-Islamic Arabia was structured around tribal kinship (*asabiyyah*) enforced through a code of retaliatory vengeance (*tha'r*) that produced protracted inter-tribal wars, compounded by the

¹⁵Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

¹⁶Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6011; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 2586.

systemic exclusion of the poor, women, orphans, and the enslaved, and by the absence of any central authority capable of adjudicating disputes beyond the personal prestige of respected mediators.¹⁷ Roughly twenty years before his prophethood, the young Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) participated in the Hilf al-Fudul, the Pact of the Virtuous, a confederation of Meccan clans formed to protect the rights of the wronged regardless of tribal affiliation. He later recalled the pact with approval: "I witnessed a pact of justice in the house of 'Abd Allah ibn Jud'an which I would not exchange for a herd of red camels, and if I were invited to it now in Islam, I would respond."¹⁸ Hamidullah identifies the Hilf al-Fudul as the earliest precursor of the prophetic model of inclusive governance—a proto-constitutional commitment that subordinated tribal self-interest to a higher principle of justice, and one that establishes an Islamic precedent for cooperation with non-Muslims in pursuit of shared justice objectives relevant to contemporary engagement with frameworks such as SDG 16.¹⁹

The Hijrah, the Brotherhood Pact, and the Constitution of Medina

The Hijrah of 622 CE—the migration of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and the Muslim community from Mecca to Medina—was preceded by the two Pledges of Aqabah, negotiated agreements through which Medina's Aws and Khazraj tribes undertook to protect the migrating community.²⁰ Upon arrival, the Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) first institutional act was the establishment of the mu'akhat, a formal brotherhood pact pairing Meccan emigrants (muhajirun) with Medinan hosts (ansar), carrying mutual obligations of financial support and inheritance.²¹ Maududi identifies the mu'akhat as the founding act of Islamic social policy—a structural rather than merely charitable response to the displacement and economic vulnerability of refugees, addressing precisely the kind of social fracture that contemporary peacebuilding theory identifies as a driver of instability.²²

The Constitution of Medina (Sahifat al-Madinah), drafted shortly after the Hijrah, constitutes the founding constitutional document of the Medinan polity. Hamidullah's reconstruction identifies forty-seven clauses establishing a unified political community (ummah wahidah) transcending tribal boundaries, collective mutual defence obligations, guaranteed religious autonomy for the Jewish tribes of Medina ("the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have their religion"), and the abolition of collective tribal punishment in favour of individual legal responsibility ("a wrongdoer injures only himself and his family").²³ Anwer and Alam's comparative analysis of the

¹⁷W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

¹⁸Ibn Hisham, in A. Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 58.

¹⁹Muhammad Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution in the World* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968).

²⁰Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*; Muhammad Hamidullah, *Muhammad Rasulallah: A Concise Survey of the Life and Work of the Founder of Islam* (Hyderabad: The Habib & Co., 1981).

²¹S. Nomani and S. S. Nadvi, *Sirat al-Nabi*, trans. M. T. Usmani, vols. 1–8 (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1979 [1892–1930]).

²²S. A. A. Maududi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. K. Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1960).

²³Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*, Clauses 1, 11, 12, 15, 23, 25, 42, pp. 41ff.

Constitution and the Magna Carta (1215 CE) argues that the Medinan document predates its English counterpart by nearly six centuries and, in its explicit guarantee of religious freedom and its inclusion of non-aristocratic and non-Muslim communities, establishes a more comprehensively pluralistic constitutional framework.²⁴ The correspondence between the Constitution's specific clauses and SDG 16's targets is precise rather than merely rhetorical: its collective-security provisions and abolition of tribal revenge address Target 16.1; its dispute-resolution authority and individual legal responsibility address Target 16.3; its codified and binding governance arrangements address Target 16.6; and its inclusion of multiple tribal and religious communities within a single political covenant addresses Target 16.7.

Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution: The Black Stone, Hdaybiyyah, and Najran

The Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) capacity for conflict mediation is evident even before his prophethood. When a dispute over the honour of repositioning the Black Stone in the rebuilt Kaaba threatened armed confrontation among Meccan clans around 605 CE, the then thirty-five-year-old Muhammad—already known as Al-Amin, the Trustworthy—resolved the impasse by placing the stone on a cloak and inviting the leaders of all competing clans to lift it jointly, an integrative solution that distributed honour rather than assigning victory.²⁵

The Treaty of Hdaybiyyah (628 CE), concluded with the Quraysh after the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and approximately 1,400 pilgrims were barred from entering Mecca, is widely regarded as the most instructive diplomatic episode of the prophetic mission.²⁶ Its terms—a ten-year truce, the return of Meccan defectors to the Muslims without reciprocal obligation, and the deferral of the pilgrimage—were regarded by many companions, including Umar ibn al-Khattab, as humiliating.²⁷ The Qur'an nonetheless describes the agreement as "a clear victory" (Qur'an 48:1), and its strategic wisdom became apparent within two years, as the truce enabled rapid growth of the Muslim community and opened diplomatic channels that facilitated the subsequent peaceful conquest of Mecca. Lederach's concept of the "time paradox" in peacebuilding—that durable peace requires accepting short-term costs for long-term structural gain—finds a documented historical precedent in this episode.²⁸

The Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) treaty with the Christian community of Najran extended comparable diplomatic principles to a non-Muslim polity, guaranteeing "their lives, property, lands, and religion," and stipulating that "no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, nor any monk from

²⁴Z. Anwer and F. Alam (2023) conducted a systematic comparative analysis of the Constitution of Medina and the Magna Carta; full publication details were not available in the source material consulted for this article. See also Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*.

²⁵Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 84–86.

²⁶Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 499–504; Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*.

²⁷Nomani and Nadvi, *Sirat al-Nabi*.

²⁸John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

his monastery, nor any priest from his priesthood."²⁹ Predating the modern minority-rights framework by roughly thirteen centuries, the Najran agreement anticipates the specific guarantees—security of property, freedom of worship, protection of religious institutions—that Target 16.10 requires.

The Conquest of Mecca: Restorative Justice and the Farewell Sermon

The conquest of Mecca in 630 CE was achieved with minimal violence and was followed by a general amnesty (al-'afw al-'aam) extended to a population that had persecuted the Muslim community for over two decades. Addressing the assembled Meccans, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) declared: "I say to you what Joseph said to his brothers: There is no blame upon you today. Go, for you are free."³⁰ Al-Azhari identifies this amnesty as the single most powerful demonstration of the prophetic model of peace in the Seerah, while Qadri reads it as an Islamic precedent for transitional justice—the management of past atrocity through mechanisms that restore social trust rather than perpetuate cycles of retribution.³¹ The subsequent declaration that "Allah has removed from you the pride of Jahiliyyah and its boasting about ancestral lineage... mankind is the children of Adam"³² formally repudiated the tribal hierarchy that had structured Meccan society for centuries, giving concrete political expression to the Qur'anic principle of equality articulated in 49:13.

The Farewell Sermon, delivered at Arafat in 632 CE before an audience estimated at 100,000–140,000, is regarded as the most comprehensive single statement of prophetic social ethics.³³ It equates the sanctity of every individual's life and property with the sanctity of the sacred city itself—"regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust... Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you"³⁴—abolishes the pre-Islamic riba and blood-debt systems, and delivers what several scholars regard as the earliest universal declaration of racial equality: "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white—except by piety and good action."³⁵ The Sermon's declaration on the rights of women—"they also have rights over you... treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers"³⁶—completes its function as a comprehensive charter addressing the sanctity of life, economic exploitation, racial hierarchy, and gender justice within a single address.

²⁹Hamidullah, *Muhammad Rasulallah*, 17.

³⁰Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 553.

³¹K. S. Al-Azhari, *Zia al-Nabi*, vols. 1–6 (Lahore: Zia ul-Quran Publications, 1999 [1975–1985]); M. T. Qadri, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism* (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran International, 2014).

³²Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 3270.

³³Nomani and Nadvi, *Sirat al-Nabi*; Al-Azhari, *Zia al-Nabi*.

³⁴Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 1741; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 1679.

³⁵Al-Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab al-Iman*, vol. 4, no. 4986; cited in Qadri, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace*.

³⁶Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 1163; Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 1851.

Judicial Institutions and the Rule of Law

The prophetic period formalised the office of qadi (judge), with the Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) instructions to Mu'adh ibn Jabal upon his appointment as judge in Yemen establishing a hierarchy of legal sources—Qur'an, then Sunnah, then independent juridical reasoning (ijtihad)—that combined principled constraint with interpretive flexibility.³⁷ The Fatimah Hadith cited above operationalised equality before the law with unmistakable personal force, while the Prophet's instruction to "give the worker his wages before his sweat dries"³⁸ extended labour protections well over a millennium before the emergence of modern labour law. Taken together, these episodes document a peacebuilding model that is structurally oriented toward the causes of conflict rather than merely its symptoms, inclusive of non-Muslim and tribal communities without conditioning inclusion on conversion, restorative rather than retributive in its treatment of former adversaries, and institutionally creative in translating ethical commitment into durable governance arrangement—characteristics that correspond closely to the positive-peace and institution-building orientation of SDG 16 itself.³⁹

Inclusive Societies in the Light of the Seerah

Shura, Accountability, and Transparency

The Qur'an commands consultative governance (shura) both as a defining characteristic of the believing community—"whose affair is determined by consultation among themselves" (Qur'an 42:38)—and as a personal obligation of the Prophet himself: "consult them in the matter" (Qur'an 3:159). This was not a ceremonial gesture. Before the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) halted his forces to seek the explicit endorsement of the Ansar; at Uhud, he accepted and implemented the majority view of his companions even though it contradicted his own preference and resulted in significant casualties.⁴⁰ Gülen reads this practice as inclusive in a socially substantive sense, extending beyond the wealthy or religiously learned to all adult members of the community, including women.⁴¹ The correspondence with Target 16.7's requirement of responsive, inclusive, and representative decision-making is direct, though the prophetic model adds a theological dimension absent from the SDG framework: consultation is not merely politically advantageous but divinely commanded.

Accountability was similarly structural rather than discretionary. The Fatimah Hadith equates the ruler's own family with any other citizen before the law, and the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) maintained

³⁷Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith No. 3592; Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 1327.

³⁸Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2443.

³⁹John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace*, Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–191.

⁴⁰Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, trans. S. M. Haq, vols. 1–2 (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1967 [c. 845 CE]).

⁴¹Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization*.

an open majlis through which any community member could bring a complaint directly to him.⁴² The written, publicly promulgated character of the Constitution of Medina itself functioned as an instrument of transparency, rendering the basis of governance authority publicly verifiable rather than dependent on the private discretion of rulers.⁴³

Minority Rights: The Jewish Tribes, the Covenant of Najran, and the Dhimma Framework

The Constitution of Medina's initial treatment of the city's Jewish tribes was unambiguously inclusive, designating them "one community with the believers" while guaranteeing religious autonomy.⁴⁴ The subsequent deterioration of relations with the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza—culminating in expulsion and, in the case of the Qurayza, execution of combatants following documented treaty violations during the Battle of the Trench—represents the most contested episode in the Seerah's record on minority rights, and Western scholarship led by Watt situates these episodes within the specific political dynamics of wartime tribal betrayal in seventh-century Arabia rather than as expressions of religious persecution.⁴⁵ The present analysis treats this record honestly: it demonstrates both that the Prophet's initial framework for minority inclusion was genuinely without precedent in its regional context, and that any governance model's inclusivity is tested, and can be strained, by conditions of active military threat.

The Covenant of Najran offers the Seerah's most extensively documented and unambiguously positive minority-rights record. In 631 CE the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) received a Christian delegation from Najran, permitted them to conduct their own prayers within the Prophet's Mosque, and concluded a treaty guaranteeing the protection of their lives, property, churches, and clergy, and prohibiting forced conversion.⁴⁶ Hamidullah and Qadri both identify the Covenant as among the earliest surviving human-rights documents in world history, its provisions corresponding in remarkable detail to Target 16.10's protection of fundamental freedoms and to Target 16.7's guarantee of communal self-governance.⁴⁷ This bilateral covenant model was generalised into the broader dhimma framework governing non-Muslim communities under Islamic governance, reinforced by the Prophet's categorical warning: "Whoever kills a dhimmi will not smell the fragrance of Paradise, even though its fragrance can be detected from a distance of forty years."⁴⁸ Abou El Fadl observes that this framing establishes minority protection as a categorical religious obligation rather than a discretionary concession, giving it a theological weight that purely political arrangements cannot replicate, even as its historical limitations—including the jizyah

⁴²Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6788; Tahir Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴³Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*.

⁴⁴Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*, Clause 25, p. 41.

⁴⁵Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*; Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*.

⁴⁶Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*; Hamidullah, *Muhammad Rasulullah*.

⁴⁷Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution*; Qadri, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace*.

⁴⁸Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith No. 2760.

tax and formal legal distinctions between Muslim and dhimmi status—must be assessed against, rather than exempted from, contemporary human-rights standards.⁴⁹

The Transformation of Women's Status

Pre-Islamic Arabia normalised female infanticide, denied women independent legal and property standing, and treated women as inheritable property; the Qur'an condemns infanticide explicitly (Qur'an 81:8–9). Against this background, the Seerah documents a systematic transformation across political, economic, and legal domains. Women took the pledge of allegiance at both 'Aqabah and Hudaibiyah as independent political actors, and the Qur'an directly addresses believing women as parties to a political covenant with the Prophet (Qur'an 60:12).⁵⁰ Nusaybah bint Ka'b fought at Uhud and personally defended the Prophet when his companions' formation broke, an act of courage the Prophet explicitly praised.⁵¹ Economically, the Qur'an established women's independent inheritance rights (Qur'an 4:7) and required that the bridal gift (mahr) be paid directly to the bride as her personal property (Qur'an 4:4)—a provision the Prophet's own household modelled through the example of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, an independent businesswoman who had employed the Prophet before their marriage.⁵² Legally, the Qur'an recognised women's testimony (Qur'an 2:282) and established khul', a woman's right to initiate divorce (Qur'an 2:229), which the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) affirmed in adjudicated practice.⁵³ The Farewell Sermon's instruction to "treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers"⁵⁴ gave this transformation its culminating public articulation. The correspondence with SDG 16 is direct: women's political participation corresponds to Target 16.7, their access to testimony and legal remedy to Target 16.3, and the general transformation of their status to the Goal's foundational "leave no one behind" commitment.

Economic Justice: Riba, Zakat, Waqf, and the Hisbah

The Seerah's model of social justice began with the dismantling of riba, the exploitative surplus through which Meccan and Medinan creditors reduced debtors to permanent bondage, condemned in the Qur'an as tantamount to "war... from Allah and His Messenger" (Qur'an 2:278–279) and formally abolished—beginning with the Prophet's own family's financial claims—in the Farewell Sermon.⁵⁵ In its place, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) institutionalised zakat as a public fiscal mechanism administered by appointed collectors (amil) and distributed across the eight beneficiary categories enumerated in Qur'an 9:60, constituting what Maududi and Qadri each describe as a structural, proto-welfare guarantee of minimum subsistence rather than

⁴⁹Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*.

⁵⁰Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*; Al-Azhari, *Zia al-Nabi*.

⁵¹Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*.

⁵²Nomani and Nadvi, *Sirat al-Nabi*.

⁵³Al-Azhari, *Zia al-Nabi*.

⁵⁴Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 1163.

⁵⁵Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 1218; Ibn Hisham, in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

discretionary charity.⁵⁶ The complementary institution of waqf—perpetual charitable endowment, established when the Prophet instructed Umar ibn al-Khattab regarding his land at Khaybar, "if you wish, you can keep the corpus of the property and give its produce in charity"⁵⁷—subsequently funded mosques, schools, and hospitals across Islamic civilisation for over a millennium. Market fairness was enforced through the hisbah, the institution of public market supervision the Prophet inaugurated after discovering a merchant concealing wet grain beneath dry grain to deceive buyers, declaring "he who deceives us is not one of us."⁵⁸ The Seerah's treatment of slavery, while not entailing outright abolition, established that the enslaved be fed and clothed identically to their households, elevated formerly enslaved companions such as Bilal ibn Rabah to positions of the highest religious visibility, and identified manumission as among the most meritorious acts available to a believer (Qur'an 90:12–16)—a record that is, as with the Jewish tribes of Medina, best assessed as genuinely progressive within its historical context while falling short of contemporary universal standards.⁵⁹ Zakat's redistributive guarantee corresponds to SDG 16's "leave no one behind" principle; waqf's conversion of private wealth into durable public capital corresponds to Target 16.6's institution-building agenda; and the hisbah's consumer-protection and anti-fraud function corresponds to the anti-corruption dimension of Target 16.5.

Discussion and Analysis: The Prophetic Model and SDG 16

Target-by-Target Correspondence

The preceding sections permit a systematic mapping between the prophetic model and SDG 16's ten substantive targets, summarised in Table 1. Of the ten targets, strong convergence is evident across seven—16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.5, 16.6, 16.7, and the religious-freedom dimension of 16.10—while partial convergence characterises three: Target 16.4 (illicit financial flows), where the riba prohibition and hisbah regulation address the underlying exploitation but not the specific contemporary mechanisms of transnational financial crime; Target 16.8 (developing-country participation in global governance), which concerns an institutional architecture that did not exist in the seventh century; and Target 16.9 (universal legal identity), which the Constitution of Medina's enumeration of constituent communities anticipates only in principle.⁶⁰ No target produced a finding of fundamental incompatibility.

⁵⁶Maududi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*; Qadri, *Islamic Curriculum on Peace*.

⁵⁷Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 2764; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 1632.

⁵⁸Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 101.

⁵⁹Nomani and Nadvi, *Sirat al-Nabi*; Fethullah Gülen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, 2nd ed. (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2000).

⁶⁰Comparative assessment developed from the target-by-target analysis underlying this article.

Table 1. Correspondence between SDG 16 Targets and the Prophetic Model

SDG 16 Target	Seerah / Qur'anic Basis	Degree of Convergence
16.1 Reduce violence	Constitution of Medina (collective security, abolition of tribal revenge); Mecca amnesty	Strong
16.2 Protect children	Qur'anic prohibition of infanticide (81:8–9); orphan-care Hadith	Strong
16.3 Rule of law, access to justice	Fatimah Hadith; qadi appointments; open mosque courts	Strong
16.4 Illicit financial flows	Riba prohibition (2:278–279); hisbah market regulation	Partial
16.5 Reduce corruption	Amanah principle (4:58); anti-bribery Hadith	Strong
16.6 Accountable institutions	Constitution of Medina; hisbah; Masjid al-Nabawi	Strong
16.7 Inclusive decision-making	Shura (42:38; 3:159); Badr and Uhud consultations	Strong
16.8 Developing-country voice in global governance	Najran and inter-polity treaty practice (indirect analogue)	Partial
16.9 Legal identity for all	Constitution of Medina's enumeration of communities	Partial
16.10 Access to information / fundamental freedoms	Covenant of Najran; Qur'an 2:256; dhimma framework	Strong

Thematic Convergences

Beyond target-specific correspondence, four cross-cutting convergences operate at the level of foundational principle rather than institutional detail. First, both frameworks treat peace and justice as inseparable: SDG 16's own title unites them, while the Qur'an's command to "make settlement between them in justice" (49:9) grounds reconciliation theologically rather than merely pragmatically.⁶¹ Second, both frameworks ground governance legitimacy in universal human dignity, though the prophetic model's grounding in the divine act of honouring "the children of Adam" (17:70) supplies an absoluteness that a philosophically derived secular dignity claim cannot fully replicate.⁶² Third, both frameworks require structural accountability: SDG 16 through external oversight mechanisms, and the prophetic model through the concept of amanah—authority as a trust held on behalf of God and community, for which the power-holder is personally and eschatologically accountable.⁶³ Fourth, both frameworks treat inclusion as a

⁶¹Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research."

⁶²Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*.

⁶³Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization*.

structural rather than discretionary imperative, articulated in the Hadith's image of the believing community as a single body in which "when any limb aches, the whole body reacts."⁶⁴

Genuine Divergences

Scholarly honesty requires equal attention to points of genuine tension. Five areas of divergence merit explicit acknowledgment. The first and most fundamental concerns the ultimate source of normative authority: SDG 16's legitimacy rests on international consensus and democratic deliberation, while the prophetic model's rests on divine revelation, not subject to revision by majority vote.⁶⁵ The second concerns the relationship between religious law and public governance: SDG 16 presumes a secular institutional architecture, whereas the Medinan state's governance arrangements were constituted as expressions of prophetic religious authority rather than delegated secular mandate.⁶⁶ The third concerns formal equality versus differentiated rights: SDG 16's indicators presume identical treatment across demographic groups, whereas the classical dhimma framework and certain inheritance and testimony provisions recognised differentiated—though not, on the classical account, inferior—categories of rights and obligation.⁶⁷ The fourth concerns the scope of communal solidarity: SDG 16 is purely universalist in scope, while institutions such as zakat carry a primary, though not exclusive, orientation toward the welfare of the Muslim community.⁶⁸ The fifth concerns the presence of an eschatological horizon in the prophetic model that is entirely absent from SDG 16's exclusively this-worldly, empirically indicator-driven conception of governance success—a divergence that, Ramadan and Gülen both suggest, may in practice strengthen rather than weaken compliance with shared governance norms in Muslim-majority contexts, since it grounds those norms in obligations with eternal consequence.⁶⁹

These divergences do not amount to fundamental incompatibility. They are divergences in the ultimate ground, institutional form, and motivational structure of shared governance objectives rather than in the substantive content of those objectives, and they position the prophetic model as complementary to, rather than competing with, SDG 16's universal framework—providing indigenous theological legitimacy, documented institutional precedent, and motivational resources that a purely secular development agenda cannot supply, while SDG 16 in turn offers measurable standards and international accountability infrastructure that pure doctrinal restatement cannot achieve on its own.⁷⁰

⁶⁴Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6011.

⁶⁵Tahir Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁶Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

⁶⁷Comparative analysis of classical dhimma and inheritance provisions against SDG 16's formal-equality indicators.

⁶⁸Analysis of zakat's primary beneficiary orientation under Qur'an 9:60.

⁶⁹Ramadan, *Radical Reform*; Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization*.

⁷⁰F. Khan and M. A. Haneef, "Religious Responses to Sustainable Development Goals: An Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Monetary Economics and Finance* 8, no. 2 (2022): 161–180.

Toward a Seerah-Based Policy Approach

The preceding analysis suggests that specific elements of the prophetic model merit direct translation into contemporary governance design in Muslim-majority states pursuing SDG 16, organised around six correspondences summarised in Table 2: participatory governance through the constitutional entrenchment of shura; rule of law through judicial independence modelled on the prophetic insistence on impartial adjudication; inclusive institutions through the revival of hisbah-style regulatory accountability and transparent, publicly documented administration; minority rights and social inclusion through constitutional protection of religious freedom grounded explicitly in Qur'an 2:256 and the Najran precedent; economic justice and anti-corruption through the modernisation of zakat and waqf as transparent, independently audited instruments of redistribution; and peacebuilding through mediation and transitional-justice mechanisms explicitly grounded in the Hudaybiyyah and Mecca-amnesty precedents.⁷¹

Table 2. Seerah-Based Governance Pillars and their Primary SDG 16 Correspondence

Governance Pillar	Seerah / Qur'anic Basis	Primary SDG 16 Targets
Participatory governance	Shura (42:38; 3:159); Badr and Uhud consultations	16.7, 16.6
Rule of law and access to justice	'Adl (4:58; 4:135); Fatimah Hadith; open mosque courts	16.3, 16.6
Inclusive institutions	Constitution of Medina; hisbah; Masjid al-Nabawi	16.6, 16.7, 16.9
Minority rights and social inclusion	Karamah (17:70); dhimma; Covenant of Najran; 2:256	16.10, 16.9, 16.2
Economic justice and anti-corruption	Riba prohibition; zakat (9:60); waqf; hisbah	16.5, 16.4, 16.1
Peacebuilding and conflict resolution	Constitution of Medina; Hudaybiyyah; Mecca amnesty	16.1, 16.2, 16.3

Three recommendations follow directly from the analysis. First, governance reform advocacy in Muslim-majority contexts should explicitly frame participatory institutions, judicial independence, and anti-corruption measures as fulfilments of Qur'anic obligation rather than as externally imposed secular conditions, since religious leaders and educational institutions can supply forms of moral authority for governance reform that technocratic development arguments alone cannot generate.⁷² Second, the zakat and waqf systems should be modernised into transparent, independently audited public institutions—rather than left as informal or privatised charitable practice—so that their considerable redistributive capacity is directed toward SDG

⁷¹W. M. Y. Wan Chik et al., "Harmonizing SDG 16 'Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions' with Maqasid al-Shari'ah," *Planning Malaysia*, advance online publication (2026).

⁷²Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2022* (London: The Economist Group, 2023); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2023).

16's inclusion targets under conditions of institutional accountability. Third, the five areas of genuine divergence identified above should be treated as an agenda for sustained scholarly and policy engagement, particularly through contemporary *ijtihad* addressing the tension between formal equality and the classical differentiated-rights framework, rather than being concealed through convenient but superficial harmonisation.⁷³

Conclusion

This article has examined whether the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) provides a theologically grounded and historically documented framework for the peaceful and inclusive societies envisioned by SDG 16. The evidence assembled from the Qur'an, authenticated Hadith, and the classical and contemporary Seerah literature supports an affirmative answer, qualified by genuine intellectual honesty about points of divergence. Across the episodes examined—the *Hilf al-Fudul*, the Hijrah and brotherhood pact, the Constitution of Medina, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, the Covenant of Najran, the general amnesty at the conquest of Mecca, the Farewell Sermon, and the institutions of *shura*, *dhimma*, *zakat*, *waqf*, and *hisbah*—the prophetic model demonstrates a structurally oriented, inclusive, restorative, and institutionally creative approach to governance that converges strongly with the majority of SDG 16's ten targets. It diverges from SDG 16 in the ultimate ground of its authority, its inseparability from religious law, its historical accommodation of differentiated rights, the scope of its communal solidarity, and its eschatological horizon—divergences that require sustained engagement rather than denial, but that do not amount to fundamental incompatibility. The relationship between the two frameworks is best understood as one of substantive convergence and complementary enrichment: the prophetic model offers Muslim-majority states an authentically grounded vocabulary and a documented institutional precedent for the pursuit of peaceful and inclusive societies, while SDG 16 offers measurable standards and international accountability mechanisms that translate that precedent into contemporary, monitorable governance commitment. Realising this complementarity in practice—through constitutionally entrenched consultation, independent judicial and regulatory institutions, protected minority and gender rights, and transparent redistributive finance—remains the central task facing scholars, religious leaders, and policymakers seeking to close the legitimacy gap that has constrained SDG 16's implementation across the Muslim world.

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⁷³Ramadan, *Radical Reform*; Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*.

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