



**November 16, 2021**

**Question by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)**

Islamic Philanthropy Senior Officer, Mr. Mohammed Abu Asaker:

[Today, there are more than 82 million refugees and internally displaced people around the world of which 60 per cent of them are Muslim. Among these refugees, only 3 percent join higher education, which has a direct negative impact on the refugees themselves, their families, communities and home countries. Therefore, UNHCR launched a pioneer scholarship program called “Aiming Higher”, which provides a unique opportunity for refugees to join higher education at their country of refuge. Through this program, refugees get to choose important majors that enable them with significant skills for the job market. UNHCR believes that investing in refugees’ education is the smartest investment in their future. Through “Aiming Higher” program, refugee students receive pocket money, books and uniform/clothing allowance as well as tuition fees for four years at school. Considering that refugees are eligible Zakat recipients, (they fall under more than 1 category of the 8 categories mentioned in the Quran), Alhamdulillah, the new education program is now Zakat eligible. This means that UNHCR can channel Zakat donations to eligible Zakat refugee students. Having said that, our understanding is that Zakat money should be given directly to refugees, and not to use Zakat money to pay the tuition fees directly to the education institutions (universities) where refugee students are enrolled. Direct payment to universities is an important process in the educational scholarship program, so UNHCR keeps its transparency and credibility of the education program and to its donors.

The question we have for the Fiqh Majlis of Canada; “Is it allowed for UNHCR to use Zakat money to cover tuition fees of eligible refugee students by directly paying the educational institutions?”

**Answer:**

Undoubtedly and as stated in your question, refugees fall under more than one category of those who can be Zakat recipients. Their education and skills development will most likely remove them and their families from poverty and need and will help them to get to a level of financial independence and contribution in their societies. It is true that in Islam, Zakat should be handed directly to the deserving party so they can benefit from it to address their immediate needs. Since Tuition fees will not go to the refugee directly but on their behalf, it would be considered as if Zakat is paid for someone’s debt or overdue bills. Therefore, we do not see any issue with the aforementioned program paying the tuition on behalf of the student but with the following conditions:

1. There should be a strict scrutiny for Zakat eligibility and only for serious, deserving and qualified refugee students
2. There should be a dedicated wakeel (agent) who is acting on behalf of UNHCR’s Islamic Philanthropy and following up with the progress of the refugee students until graduation
3. Tuition funds should be paid only on Education subjects of essential nature such as engineering, medical studies and services, Business, teaching or learning a trade... which will Insha Allah lead to benefit for both the person and for their community/country. Also included in the former, all professional skills development programs to update and improve skilled workers or professionals and build income earning capabilities.

And Allah knows best!