

Glasgow Moon Sighting Fatwa 2006

Translation by Qamar Uddin (from audio recordings by Maulana Mohammad Ejaz)

Question

Some of us Muslims from Glasgow are turning to your help, hoping from Allah (swt) that through your knowledge and wisdom, you can provide a solution to our [moon sighting] problem.

In Britain, due to persistent cloudy weather, sighting the crescent moon of first or second night is impossible. There are few months in the year when the moon sets before the sunset. In other Muslim countries, the moon of second or third day is seen very easily and stays on the horizon for a long time. Therefore, we are forced to obtain moon sighting news from other Muslim countries.

As a result, the Muslims of Britain have been divided into two groups. One group of people follow the news from Saudi Arabia and the other group follow Morocco or sometimes South Africa. This has divided the community and even families into celebrating Eid on two separate days for the following reasons.

- 1) Those who follow Morocco or South Africa, have contact with their respective Hilal Committees and they are able to get the news where the crescent is seen by large number of people (Ruyat-e-Ammah) through naked eye and the news is consistent with that of the astronomical observatories.
- 2) Most Muslims here follow Saudi Arabia and their view is that the Saudi Supreme Court makes the decision based on two witnesses according to Sunnah and the decision of the Qadih is binding on the Muslims of Britain because there is no moon sighting in the country.
- 3) Those who do not follow Saudi Arabia present their proofs as follows:
 - a) in Saudi Arabia, there is no Ruyat-e-Ammah (public sighting) and only the same two – three people always give the witnesses to the court
 - b) Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (RA), Mufti Muhammad Shafi (RA) and many astronomers state that the moon cannot be seen more than 28 nights. Maulana Zakariyah (RA) stated that while he was in Madinah and saw the moon after Fajr on the 28th Ramadan, but was surprised to hear the news in the same evening that the first of the new month has started. There are many other people who have witnessed the same scenario.
 - c) Many other reliable people visiting Saudi Arabia have confirmed that after the official announcement of the start of month, they have not been able to sight the moon in clear sky on the next day or the day after.
 - d) The Ummul Qura calendar displayed on the noticeboards of both Haramains are used by the people to start the new months and keep the fast of Ayyam-e-Bidh (white fasts) as well as the fasts of Muharram and Shaban. And more than 90% of the time, Eids are celebrated according to this calendar. When inquired from insiders, it was discovered that before 2003, first day of month starts when New Moon Conjunction occurs before midnight of London (or Saudi Local time of 3 am); then it was changed to when New Moon Conjunction occurs before Makkah sunset time; now the formula adopted is that when New Moon Conjunction occurs before Makkah sunset and the moon sets at least 1 minute after sunset, then the new month will start. The outcome of the first formula was that the month in Saudi Arabia used to start two days before Pakistan and the moon used to set before sunset. The second formula also used to give similar results. The third formula has resulted in some months starting on the same date as in nearby countries and others months start a day after Saudi Arabia as also noticed by many people looking at the first quarter moon, full moon, last quarter moon etc. Before 2005, people used to follow the news that the crescent moon has been sighted in Saudi Arabia. Those who are well-versed in geography know that this is not possible. After further inquiries, we learned that those people were either following Saudi Arabia or the Presence of the Moon (moonset after sunset on Makkah horizon) formula. For example, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Sudan. UAE. In 2005, Nigeria started Ramadan before all other countries on 13 October and did Eid-ul Fir on 2 November, such that India, Pakistan started Ramadan two or three days later. In some years, there were solar eclipses in the regions and yet moon sighting news were coming from Saudi Arabia.

Finally, I have one question to ask about our Glasgow city. The Ummah is disunited with anxiety and hatred against each other. One party is not willing to give-up following Saudi Arabia and other party is not prepared to accept the Presence of the Moon formula of Saudi Arabia, which has resulted in Eid on different days in the same house. In this situation, does the holy Shariah allow us all to start following Saudi Arabia, knowing that our obligatory fast may be missed and our sacrifices may be given before due time? In whole of Britain, in some years people start Ramadan at the same date and in some years a day after than Saudi Arabia. In our Glasgow city, we used to start differently than Saudi Arabia, but the situation has now changed for over a year and now most people follow Saudi Arabia since the announcement comes very early via television and other media. The news circulates like wildfire that the moon has been sighted in Saudi Arabia. So, should we follow nearby country like Morocco or South Africa like we used to do or should we join the new generation to follow Saudi Arabia? Please advise us whichever way is most closed to the ways of Allah and his Prophet (saw) that we should adopt.

Wa Assalamualaykum.

Gulam Ali, Glasgow (UK)

Dated: 4/4/2006

Answer

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

From the information, you have stated in your question, the answer in summary is that according to astronomical calculations, the moon sighting decision of the Saudi Arabian government is sometimes doubtful and other times impossible, the example of which you have provided. All this matters are correct according to their point of view and not without basis.

The fundamental question is, if a witness comes forward, which is not possible according to astronomical calculations, is it acceptable from a Shariah point of view or not? This matter is *Mustahad Fi*. Some scholars are of the view that the witness is not acceptable, but there is yet a large group of scholars who state that a witness cannot be rejected purely based on astronomical calculations. There is already a detailed fatwa from Mufti Rafi Usmani (DB) from Darul Uloom Karachi on this topic, that in the case of witness statement conflicting with astronomical calculations, the witness statement will take precedence (Fatwa Reference stated).

According to a response to a question from Germany by Mufti Rafi Usmani (DB), he mentioned that the Saudi Arabian government has stated their moon sighting decision is purely based on witness statement and not on astronomical calculations. This response may not be accepted by some people as it was astronomically impossible, but in the absence of any Shariah evidence to the contrary, it cannot be refuted. Therefore, if the Saudi Arabian government decision is based on witness statements and not on astronomical calculations, then it would be permitted for the Muslims in Germany follow Saudi Arabia (Fatwa Reference stated).

In response to a question in Britain, Mufti Taqi Usmani (DB) said that following Saudi Arabia for Ramadan and Eid is a *Ijtihadi Masala* (i.e. question of analogy). It is true that Saudi Arabian government make announcement at times when according to astronomical calculations it is not possible. However, a large group of scholars have considered that it is acceptable in such a situation (not to rely on astronomical calculations). If a group of scholars of a country wish to adopt this view for the sake of Unity, then there is no objections from Shariah point of view.

Those who follow Morocco news are more cautious. However, if adopting a cautious view leads to disunity and divisions in a large part of the community, then such a cautious view does not seem to be appropriate in the opinion of this author.

In answer to your question, if the majority of the people in your community are already doing Ramada and Eid according to news from Saudi Arabia, then there is no objection in you uniting the community on that basis. It is evident that if there is permissibility of following Saudi Arabia news, then there does not arise any fear of your Ramadan and Eid not being valid in Shariah.

And Allah knows best!

(Mufti) Muhammad Usman Gafur Ullah
Darul Ifta, Darul Uloom Karachi
15/4/1427 AH

The answer is correct:

Signed 3:

*Mahmood Shafee
(May Allah forgive him)
17/4/1427 (left)*

Signed 2:

*Muhammed AbdulMannan
(May he be pardoned) Darul Ifta.
Karachi. 17/4/1427 (centre)*

Signed 1:

*Muhammed Taqi Uthmani
(May he be pardoned). Mufti, Darul
bloom Karachi 17/4/1427 (right)*

This document can be obtained from the ICOUK website at www.moonsighting.org.uk

NOTE: It is no longer "impossible" to sight the first day's moon in the UK as reported on the ICOUK website – Editor (2017)

*The above fatwa (2006) has been **abrogated** (cancelled) by a new fatwa (2022) to adopt local moon sighting.*
https://www.moonsighting.org.uk/Istiftaa-Fatwa/UK_MoonSighting_Fatawa_1443-Merged.pdf (p.42)