66293 - They are living in the west and do not know about any poor people –can they send their zakat al-fitr to another country?

the question

We are Saudis living in Europe and we do not know about any poor people here. We have found a person who is trustworthy – in sha Allah – who said, “Give me the money and I will buy rice with some of it and give it to the poor and I will give some of it to them in cash. His argument is that there are more then 500 of us and it will be too difficult for him to buy such a large amount as it will be too difficult to carry it, and because the poor may not want anything but money because they can make more use of it than they can of rice. Should we give him the money or should we delegate our brothers in Saudi to give it on our behalf?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The majority of scholars (including Maalik, al-Shaafa’i and Ahmad) are of the view that it is not permissible to give zakat al-fitr in the form of cash, rather it must be given in the form of food, as was enjoined by the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Al-Bukhaari (1504) and Muslim (984) narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) enjoined zakat al-fitr, one saa’ of dates or a saa’ of barley, for everyone, free or slave, male or female, of the Muslims.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: Many of the poor nowadays say that they prefer to receive zakat al-fitr in the form of cash instead of food, because it is more useful to them. Is it permissible to give zakat al-fitr in the form of cash?

He replied:

What we think is that it is not permissible to give zakat al-fitr in the form of cash under any

circumstances, rather it must be given in the form of food. If the poor man wants to sell the food and make use of its price, he may do so, but the one who is giving this zakah has to give it in the form of food. It does not matter if it is the kinds of food that were known at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or is a kind of food that is known nowadays. Rice nowadays may be more beneficial than wheat, because with rice one does not need to go to the effort of grinding it and making dough, and so on. The purpose is to benefit the poor. It was narrated in Saheeh al-Bukhaari that Abu Sa'eed (may Allah be pleased with him) said: At the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) we used to give (as zakat al-fitr) a saa' of foodstuff, and our food at that time was dates, barley, raisins and dried yogurt. So if a person gives it in the form of food, he should choose a food that will most beneficial to the poor; this will vary from one time and place to another.

With regard to giving it in the form of cash, clothing, furnishings or tools, this is not sufficient and does not discharge the obligation, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever does an action that is not part of this matter of ours will have it rejected."

End quote. Majmoo' Fatawa Ibn 'Uthaymeen, 18/question no. 191.

Based on this, if this person is trustworthy then you can stipulate that he has to give it all in the form of food. If he does not accept that, then you should give whatever you can to the poor of the land in which you are staying. Then there is nothing wrong with sending the rest of the zakah to another country. It is not essential for it to be sent to your country of origin, rather if you send it to wherever the need and poverty is greatest, or to relatives, that will be better.

In the answer to question no. 43146 we stated that there is nothing wrong with sending zakah to another country when there is a need, such as sending it to a land where there are relatives of the donor, or to a land where the need is greater.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen was asked: Can a person living in the west give zakat al-fitr on behalf of his family, knowing that they have given it on behalf of themselves?

He replied: zakat al-fitr – which is a saa' of food such as rice, wheat, dates or other foodstuffs, is

something which each person should give on behalf of himself, as is the case with other obligatory duties, because Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) enjoined sadaqat al-fitr upon the Muslims, free and slave, male and female, young and old, and he enjoined that it be given before the people go out to the prayer.

If the members of a household have given it on behalf of themselves, there is no need for a man who is away from his family to give it on their behalf. Rather he should give it on behalf of himself only, in the place where he is staying, if there are Muslims there who are entitled to this charity. If there is no one there who is entitled to it, then he should delegate his family to give it on his behalf in his homeland. And Allah is the Source of strength.

End quote. Majmoo’ Fatawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 18/question no. 771

He was also asked: What is the ruling on sending zakat al-fitr to distant countries on the grounds that there are many poor people there?

He replied:

There is nothing wrong with sending zakat al-fitr to another country on the grounds that there are no poor people in one's own country. But if that is done even though there are poor people who need it in one's own country, then it is not permissible.

End quote. Majmoo’ Fatawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 18/question no. 102

There follows a fatwa from the scholars of the Standing Committee which deals wwith these matters and more:

The amount of zakat al-fitr is one saa’ of dates, barley, raisins, dried yogurt or other foodstuff, and it should be given on the night before Eid, until before the Eid prayer. It is also permissible to give it two or three days in advance. It should be given to the poor Muslims in the land where it is given, but it is permissible to send it to the poor in another land if the need is greater. It is permissible for the imam of the mosque and other trustworthy people to collect it and distribute it

to the poor, so long as they make sure it reaches them before the Eid prayer. It is not connected to inflation, rather the amount is set in sharee'ah as one saa'. Whoever does not have anything but food for the day of Eid for himself and for those on whom he is obliged to spend, does not have to give zakat al-fitr. It is not permissible to use it for building mosques or other charitable projects.

Fatawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah, 9/369, 370.

We have already quoted the fatwas of scholars which state that zakat al-fitr is obligatory, how much is to be given, that it is not permissible to give it in cash, and that it is permissible to send it to countries where the need is greater, in the answers to the following questions: 22888, 27016, 7175 and 12938.