



British Muslims defend Halal slaughter after calls for ban

Sunday, 06 May 2012 AL ARABIYA



Muslims believe the halal slaughter method ensures the least amount of pain possible for an animal and is in accordance with animal welfare measures. (File photo)

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By AL ARABIYA

Muslims in Britain have rebuffed calls to ban animals' halal slaughter after a leading British vet this week called for curbing or even banning the practice popular among the country's Muslim and Jewish minorities.

Professor Bill Reilly, former president of the British Veterinary Association, called for curbing the practice of slaughtering animals without stunning.

"Non-stun slaughter... appears to be increasing. From an animal welfare perspective this cannot be acceptable," Reilly said.

"However, we are fortunate to live in a tolerant society and respect the religious beliefs of different faiths and must reconcile animal welfare with religious freedom.

"In my view, the current situation is not acceptable and, if we cannot eliminate non-stunning we need to keep it to the minimum," he added.

"This means restricting the use of Halal and Kosher meat to those communities that require it for their religious beliefs and, where possible, convincing them of the acceptability of the stunned alternatives."

Reilly's opinion was published recently in the journal *Veterinary Record*, On Islam website reported on Saturday.

But his comments have been met by criticism from Muslims in the country.

"We believe this is a requirement. [Halal] slaughter is quick, so pain is minimized and there is no unnecessary suffering," Saleem Kidwai, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Wales, told Wales Online.

"We believe it should continue," Kidwai added.

British ministers have sought to change a law to ensure that meat slaughtered using Islamic (halal) methods cannot be sold without proper labeling.

The Daily Mail reported in April that "unwitting members of the public" in Britain are being served halal meat "secretly" in schools, hospitals, pubs and famous sporting venues, claiming that many in Britain, including animal rights campaigners, deem the traditional Islamic way of preparing meat as "cruel."

Like Jewish kosher slaughter, the halal – meaning permissible in Arabic – method requires the butcher to kill the animal by slitting its throat, ensuring the animal is not stunned first to lessen its ordeal.

Some Muslims say that the halal method ensures the least amount of pain possible for an animal and is in accordance with animal welfare measures.

Halal meat now accounts for 25 percent of the entire UK meat market, according to Reilly. But his figures have been challenged by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which put the number of slaughtered halal animals at much smaller percentage.

"The results indicate that the number of animals not stunned prior to slaughter is relatively low, accounting for 3 percent of cattle, 10 percent of sheep and goats, and 4 percent of poultry," an FSA spokesman told BBC.

Meanwhile, the UK government is now drawing up plans to prevent the supply of halal meat to people who are not aware about the method their meat has been slaughtered in, the Daily Mail reported.

The current laws in the UK allow slaughtering animals without prior stunning to enable Jewish people and Muslims to meet the dietary requirements of their faiths.

But a new EU directive on the protection of animals at the time of killing will come into force in the UK in 2013, On Islam reported.

"We plan to consult on the implementation of new welfare at slaughter regulations shortly and will be seeking views on how to restrict the non-stun slaughter of animals as part of that consultation," a Welsh government spokeswoman told Wales Online.

Following France

The move mimics a recent suggestion from the French prime minister who urged Muslims and Jews to consider scrapping their halal and kosher slaughter laws.

Prime Minister Francois Fillon made the suggestion after President Nicolas Sarkozy called last month for butchers to clearly label meat slaughtered according to religious laws, while his allies warned immigrants might impose halal meat on French schoolchildren.

This received criticism from the international press. In an opinion piece titled "The lands of foie gras and puppy mills are suddenly horrified by animal slaughter," Emma Teitel of Canada-based *Macleans*' news weekly wrote:

"The ritual method through which halal meat is slaughtered ... is just as legal in France as the secular alternative

(‘captive bolt stunning,’ in which the animal is sedated via stun gun before it’s killed), but Le Pen maintains that halal’s ‘horrible cruelty’ warrants special condemnation,” in reference to Marine Le Pen, presidential candidate of France’s right-wing National Front party.

Le Pen had claimed, falsely as would later transpire, that all meat sold in Paris shops is halal, stirring up suspicions in France’s longstanding and sometimes bitter debate about cultural immigration.

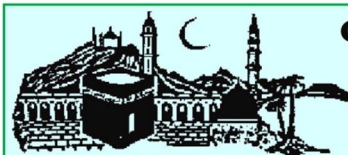
While the debate is typical of a country that has for years debated how far it is willing to accommodate Islam, in Britain the new controversy over the halal slaughter methods may perhaps come as a surprise to Muslim communities in the country.

“Everything about the Islamic way of life is under attack so it makes you wonder if this is actually about humanity to animals,” one worshipper at the Central London Mosque told BBC Radio 4.

The Muslim Council of Britain, meanwhile, has maintained that animals are not distressed when they are slaughtered

“It’s a sudden and quick haemorrhage. A quick loss of blood pressure and the brain is instantaneously starved of blood and there is no time to start feeling any pain,” spokesman Dr. Majid Katme told the BBC.

(Written by Eman El-Shenawi



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