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*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.*  
**A letter to the community regarding Coronavirus (CO-VID 19)**

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The Colorado Imam Council (CIC) remains dedicated to providing religious guidance and ensuring the physical well-being of the Colorado Muslims community. Since we have started dealing with matters pertaining to Coronavirus (CO-VID19) the CIC has been contacted by local Muslim health professionals and we have also sought their help and guidance to affirm what is true, dispel rumors, and to determine what is the safest way we can move forward as Muslim individuals and Muslim organizations.

*Directives to the Colorado Muslim Community*

With that we have come up with the following directions to the community regarding attending burials during the CO-VID19 pandemic:

- Any burial of a community member who has died, from any cause, we ask that number in attendance to the burial be a maximum 10 people in accordance with the directive from Governor Polis and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Relatives of those who have died from CO-VID19 may be carriers of the disease. They should remain in their home to not infect others for the time recommended by health experts. During the burial process and consoling those who are grieving it is difficult and even impossible to maintain proper distancing. Those in attendance must wear proper clothing and personal protective equipment. We ask the family to please be patient with the volunteers of the community who are helping with the burial (janazah) procedures including the burial washing (ghusl).
- We request that there be no family and friend visitation for condolences (bait ajir, 'aza) after any death of any until the prohibitions are lifted by state and county health departments. The greater good to perform currently is to ensure the health and safety of community members and the grieving family.
- We ask the community also to be considerate of the great loss of the family grieving and any wish for privacy.
- We direct the janazah coordinators to not announce to the community the time and location of the burials to keep the number of those in attendance to a minimum. The community is to be informed of those who died as always to request du'a for the deceased.



### *The Process of Janazah Washing and Burial*

Regarding the actual burial procedure, the CIC has received several inquiries regarding the rights of Muslims who die while infected with COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). In response, CIC issued the following guidelines:

The ritual washing of the dead is one of the communal obligations based on the prophetic command and the unanimous agreement of Muslims. It is, therefore, inappropriate to bury a believer without the ritual wash. All capable Muslims of his neighborhood will incur a sin if they fail to perform that obligation. This is the case in all communal obligations: if they are performed by some, all will be relieved of the burden, and if they are not, all will be liable.

Washing the dead is like washing the living: it suffices to pour water on the entire body, without rubbing, which is only required by the Malikis. Washing the dead is a devotional act of worship, so it must be done by a Muslim, and a non-Muslim may only be involved, if required, to oversee the protective measures and instruct the washers on their utilization. It is incumbent upon the Muslims who take on this communal obligation to learn and practice those protective measures and comply diligently with the instructions of the public health agencies.

There are the rules to be applied in normal scenarios. We must not violate them as long as we have the capacity to observe them.

It is permissible in ritual washing to simply pour water on the body, and in the case of the presence of contagious diseases, the water can be poured on top of the cloth (that is not water repellent). Some jurists allowed the non-marriageable kin of a woman to wash her - in the absence of women - by pouring water on top of her clothes. The same may be said about someone who has a contagious disease, if the transmission of the disease is feared. The water will undoubtedly reach the body through the non-water-repellent cloth if enough amount was poured.

If washing was not possible because of the lack of water or the inability to use it, the alternative ritual purification by tayammum is resorted to. The dead are offered tayammum (dry ablution), just as the living would perform it, by striking the dust (or a stone) with the two hands and then wiping the face and hands of the deceased with them, even while wearing gloves. If dry ablution was also prevented or its harm was justifiably feared, then the obligation drops all together. The dead should be offered the funeral prayer and buried.

The default regarding those who die with COVID-19, as far as we have learned from the experts at the time of writing this fatwa, is that there is no likely harm in washing them while following the precautions advised by the public health agencies. As we deal with the patients infected with coronavirus while taking the necessary precautions, so should we deal with the dead while observing the same precautions, because of the possibility of transmission, even though that is more likely from the living. Based on this, if the relevant authorities did not prevent their washing, and the specialists did not warn of its likely harm, then we must not fail to perform this obligation, even by pouring water on the body without touching it at all.

This is the right of the casualties of this epidemic on the Muslim community: to wash them and fulfill their rights before their burial. If the relevant authorities banned washing them, or the



specialists warned of its likely harm, then we do tayammum (dry ablution) instead, and if that too was banned, then the obligation is lifted all together.

If washing was permitted, but the washer was required to self-quarantine, as some have relayed to CIC to be the case in certain places, and no one steps forward to do this from the deceased's family or others, then the obligation is lifted because of this hardship.

Hoping for the reward of the martyr for people who die in such epidemics does not mean that they may not be washed, because those rulings apply only to the martyrs of the battlefield.

Shrouding is another obligation on the dead, so if it is not possible according to the way prescribed in the Sunnah, then they may be shrouded in the hospital gowns, and if the body was received in a bag that is not to be opened, then the bag will suffice in covering their nakedness. The funeral prayer will be offered, and they will be buried.

The funeral prayer is one of the rights of our dead, and it is a communal obligation: if one person performed it, the rest will not be liable, and if there were more than one person, they pray in congregation behind the imam, while keeping the recommended distance between each of them. This will not invalidate their prayer. Whoever wants to pray at the grave afterwards or perform the absentee prayer, they may do that. All of this would be permissible and accepted by the All-Hearing, All-Knowing, Most Generous and Gracious Lord.

It is permissible, if requested by the family, to livestream the prayer and burial and any part that does not involve showing the nakedness of the deceased or violating their dignity. Some of these online platforms offer private live streaming that can be watched by the family only and those close to the deceased, to bring solace to their hearts and ease the pain of their inability to be present.

It is needless to mention here that the burning of bodies (cremation) has nothing to do with Islamic teachings and has nothing to do with the heavenly messages.

These are the rights of the dead Muslims on us: We become exempt from fulfilling them only in the case of a valid excuse. Whenever they are not performed, this will not harm the dead in any way, for they are returning to the Just, the Generous, the Most Merciful.

### *The Question of Cremation*

The question has come about the cremation of the bodies of those who have died from contracting COVID-19. Within the United States and in the state of Colorado cremation has not been required. The CIC would like to additionally share the following:

**FIRST:** The idea that cremating the bodies of Coronavirus victims safeguards the living (by preventing the spread of infection) has not been proven at all. A decision of this magnitude should not rely on conjecture alone, nor on the testimony of a doctor or two. Rather, this is a matter on which the public health authorities should agree or come close to agreement. This has not happened. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) has already published guidelines concerning the safe burial of Coronavirus victims (without cremation).

**SECOND:** As far as choosing cremation instead of burial because of difficulties involved in performing traditional burials, or because of financial hardships, we emphasize firstly that the removal of hardship is a recognized principle in our religion. In the case where the death toll is increasing rapidly to the point where we fear that the living will be harmed by the presence of unburied corpses, we can solve the difficulty posed by traditional burials by digging larger



graves and performing mass burials, or by using alternative means to deal with the situation. However, such a rapid rate of death being caused by this disease is not realistic at this time, nor is it expected to occur.

**THIRD:** Regarding cremation when done for preservation of life, as in the case where a widespread calamity results in a rapid rate of death to the point where there is an inability to bury all of the deceased and the presence of their unburied corpses poses a threat to the living, or in the case where medical professionals assert that cremating the bodies of those who died of a disease is imperative in order to preserve life (by warding off infection):

In these cases, cremation becomes permissible due to dire necessity. This is because even though the inviolability of the deceased is like that of the living (as understood by the hadith which compares breaking the bone of a corpse to breaking it while the person was alive), we still prioritize the welfare of the living over the rights of the deceased if we find ourselves in a situation where we have to choose one over the other, and that is because preserving life must take priority.

*Finally*, we add that if the authorities in a particular country attempt to pass laws requiring the cremation of corpses, with the presence of other alternatives that would prevent the harming of the living, it would become an obligation upon the Muslims to work together with members of other faiths in an attempt to block such legislation from being passed into law. If they fail, then Allah does not burden a soul with more than what it can bear.

And Allah, the Exalted, knows best. May His peace and blessings be upon Prophet Mohammad. All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

[Adapted from the American Muslim Jurists Association (AMJA) fatwah regarding Covid-19 [www.amjaonline.org](http://www.amjaonline.org)]