

# The *Ansar* in Us

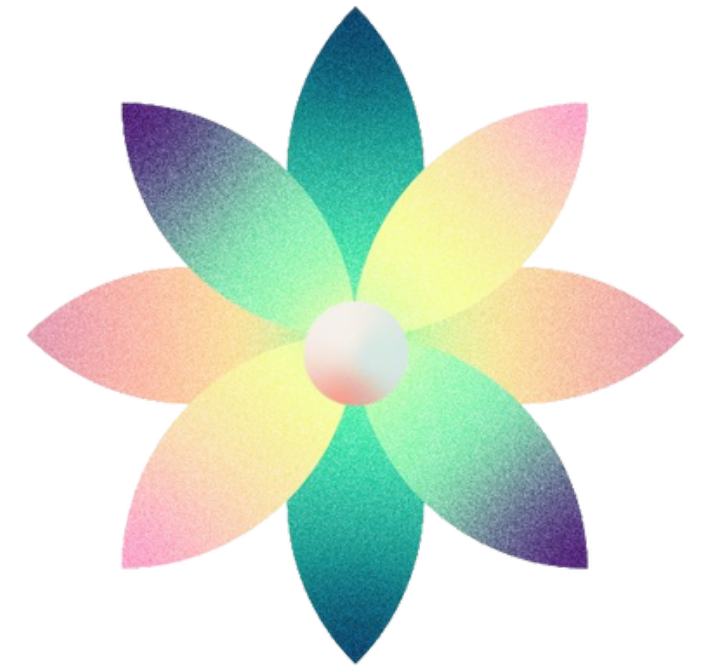
## A Quick Guide to Extending Responsible and Compassionate Support in Times of Calamities

Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir reported:

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said,

*The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.*

Şaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6011, Şaḥīḥ Muslim 2586



Calamities are a natural part of life in this world. They are a test not just for those who directly experience them but also for those who have the capacity to help. Do we help our brothers and sisters experiencing difficulties? And if we do, how sure are we that we are helping in the best way possible?

Below are some important actions to take when extending support to brothers and sisters in our communities:

### 1 CHECKING ONE'S INTENTIONS, CAPACITIES & CIRCUMSTANCES

*Why do we want to help? What do we have that we can contribute or use to extend support?*

Let us constantly **purify our intentions** when helping. Let us also make sure that we **assess what we can and cannot do based on our current skills and/or capacities and life circumstances**. We need to remember that helping others doesn't mean neglecting or disregarding our own needs and our responsibilities at home and in our own communities.

### 2 CONTEXTUALIZATION: Know the context of the calamity/crisis before extending support

Extending support requires knowing several things about the calamity and the affected communities prior to visiting our brothers and sisters because:

- it helps us **prepare ourselves better** physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually.
- it **prevents us from causing unintentional harm** to the communities we are helping. For example, asking survivors about what happened and about their specific experiences may lead to re-traumatization and drain them even more, but they may be shy to share their honest feelings about these questions because they are in need of assistance. It is thus best to know about the context from reliable sources even before the visit.
- it helps us **identify better the resources, services and linkages** needed to help the communities heal and recover.

### 3 COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

Whether we are volunteering as individuals, informal groups or formal organizations, **coordination** is key for extending support effectively and responsibly. There are usually **task forces or clusters** created by the government (along with international organizations) to make disaster response more organized and to prevent duplication of efforts in an area, neglect of other communities, and activities that may (unintentionally) harm affected communities. **There are also cases when there are no task forces created and assistance can come from various parties**. In such cases, it is advised to know and coordinate with local officials or point persons who are already hosting and/or assisting affected communities. **Collaborative efforts** may then be explored to provide both short-term and long-term assistance. Of course, these are all done with the **participation of the affected communities**. The more we work together and complement each other, the better the quality of the support.

### 4 COMPASSIONATE CARE

Extending support means **caring for our brothers and sisters the way we want to be cared for while maintaining healthy boundaries**. It is to **protect and promote their safety and dignity without them making dependent on us**. It is to **communicate empathically**. They may not be able to express certain needs given their challenging situation, hence, we need to be sensitive to these ourselves. *If we were in their situation, how would we want to be treated? Are we giving them privacy and time to pause to process how they feel? Do we avoid making promises about assistance that are beyond our control? Do we give them a voice and do we respect their wishes? Do we also protect our own time and space?*

Compassionate care also means **being mindful that each community has its own culture and each person may have certain trauma responses based on their life experiences**, hence, they may perceive some of our (well-meaning) acts differently. We need to be patient and understanding as we help them identify their needs, strengths and plan of actions, and connect them to needed programs and services.

### 5 CONFIDENTIALITY

Although we've already mentioned the need to protect and promote safety and dignity, the issue of **confidentiality** deserves special attention nowadays. Responsible support means **respecting and protecting our brothers' and sisters' identity online and offline**. While some of us may feel like posting photos or updates on our social media accounts, we need to remember that **our focus should be on the well-being of our brothers and sisters**. We avoid sharing their personal information and photos that clearly identify who they are. At times, they may give their permission for this and even insist on it to raise awareness, which makes this a special case, but we always strive to protect their identity and dignity.

### 6 CHECKING IN ON THEM

Extending support also includes **checking how our brothers and sisters are** when the situation has improved while maintaining healthy boundaries that would help them stand on their own. The community spirit is sometimes felt more when a disaster strikes, and people feel isolated or left behind when things get better. We need to remember that the strength of our community is seen in both good and bad times. Besides, let's admit it: **it feels good to have someone who asks how we are even when we are able to manage life's challenges, right?**