

The Roles of Islamic Social Welfare Assistant (*Zakat*) for the Economic Development of New Convert

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Abstract: This study demonstrates literately the importance of social welfare assistant (*Zakat*) towards the economic development among new convert. As one of the several instruments by Islam, *Zakat* is important to combat and enhance welfare in the society. It also helps to generate a flow of funds and recruit the necessary manpower. Meanwhile, new convert Muslims has just made the biggest decision of their lives and changed their religion as well as their way of live to one that they are unfamiliar with in many ways. Thus, *Zakat* plays significant role in enhancing economic development in order 'to win' and 'to soften' the heart of the new convert to follow Islam as a way of life. Previous Islamic scholar agreed that the term new convert also includes non-Muslims, but only for the purpose of turning their hearts to Islam. The objective of this article is to explore the problems of new converts and the contribution of *Zakat* towards reducing their problems. Qualitative method based on document analysis and interview with recent officer are used in this article. This article is trying to answer the type of problem that new convert are facing and trying to look at *Zakat* distribution as the solution for their problems.

Key words: New Converts • Zakat Allocation • GDP

INTRODUCTION

In general, Islam bring justice to this world which added with enough evidence by Al-Qur'an to justify the truth of its message by providing logical reasoning and it reflects to open space of human hearts to accept Islam. Through the justice and truthfulness of Islamic teaching, it attracts the human to be part of its through conversion. For example, in United Kingdom, the number of converts to Islam is estimated to have almost doubled in the past decade, from 61,000 in 2001, to stand now at approximately 100,000, or 4% of the British Muslim community. New Converts in United Kingdom in 2010 alone are put at 5,200 in the light of a survey of over 250 London mosques [1]. It is expected that the Muslim share of the global population will rise primarily because of their relatively high birth rate, the large number of Muslims of childbearing age and an increase in life expectancy in

Muslim-majority countries. New conversion will play relatively little part in the increase and it found out that Islam loses as many adherents via conversion as it gains (Brian J. Grim. *et. al*, 2011).

'New Convert' is a person who converted or interpreted as revert to Islam regardless of races and nation. Multi-religion, ethnicity and diversity is very important in policy making, so this article is try to highlight the uniqueness of *Zakat* distribution in multi-ethnic and multi-religion country. Islam is for everyone not for some specific races thus, the cultural of specific races in the early assumption should be not affect the way of new convert lifestyle or decision in policy.

Zakat is one of the pillars of faith in Islam that emphasizes the socio-economic development. Any discussion on *Zakat* in the context of worship cannot be disconnected from the socio-economic factor, especially in aiding the underprivileged based on the

Maslahat concept [2]. The definition of *Zakat* has been done in various ways such as grow, blessing, pure, good and renowned. Further, from the *Fiqh* point of view, *Zakat* can produce a certain amount from a specific wealth for the benefit of those who are entitled to receive it as stipulated by Allah [3]. Most of new convert had nowhere to go after they converted to Islam. Most of them are lack of education and care. The new convert people really need and seek for help for the muslim people to enhance their faith. Al-Qardawi (1986) stated that beside alleviate poverty among new convert, *Zakat* distribution should be improving and increase the *Tauhid* (The Oneness of Allah), *Iman* (believes) and *Taqwa* (level of righteousness) to Allah (s.w.t) [4].

Further, *Zakat* also bring gratitude and thankfulness to God for the bounties that He bestows on us. God has bestowed on humans spiritual and material bounties. Prayers and other physical worships express gratitude for the grace of creation, while *Zakat* and other financial worships express gratitude for the material grace of God. How disgraceful is he who sees the obvious needs of the poor and does not graciously give one-fourth of a tenth of his wealth, or thank God who gave him enough bounty to remove him from the misery and pressure of poverty. *Zakat*, as one of the five pillars of Islam, has obliged certain people to contribute part of their wealth to the new convert. *Zakat* has also become an important financial source, especially in dense Muslim population countries [5]. *Zakat* fund could act as an incentive to the new convert as part of the effort to assist them to become economically productive recipients if the fund is channelled in a sustainable form. Moreover, the *Zakat* fund could free the recipients from poverty and improve their living standard.

The primary purpose of *Zakat* is to redistribute wealth of the society among the poor [6]. *Zakat* is not purely welfare-oriented that relies on the contribution of the giver but an obligation that must be carried out to qualified recipients. Therefore, it is pertinent that the management of *Zakat* should be made efficient to ensure that the rights of the recipients and the society, in general, will not be put in jeopardy. History has confirmed that one of the reasons that led to the fall of the Umayyad dynasty was its government's failure to manage the Baitulmal successfully [7].

As stated in Islamic Encyclopaedia, the word new convert comes from the Arabic '*Al-Muallafa Qulubuhum*'

which means "those whose hearts are won over" or "those hearts that need softening". On the other hand, the actual phrase is connected with the Quran in the *Surah Al-Taubah*: 60, which means:

"Zakat is for: the poor, the destitute, those who collect it, reconciling people's hearts (New Convert), frees slaves, spending in the way of Allah and travellers. It is a legal obligation from Allah. Allah is all knowing, all wise"

Based from above phrase, *Zakat* plays significant role 'to win' and 'to soften' the heart of the new convert to follow Islam as a way of life. Previous Islamic scholar agreed that the term new convert also includes non-Muslims, but only for the purpose of turning their hearts to Islam. For example, al-Qaradawi (1986) states, where there is a group of infidels or unbelievers being courted in the hope that they will accept Islam, such as the case of Safwan. During the opening of Mecca, Safwan was given a period of four months by the Prophet s.a.w to consider accepting Islam. When the battle of Hunayn occurred, he took part in it. The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w then lent Safwan his sword and gave him a few camels, taken from a valley. Consequently, after that incident, Safwan became a good Muslim [8]. The hadith *Sohih* referring to the event appears in the *Sunan* al-Tirmidhi, which means: From Safwan, son of Umayya, who said:

"On the day of the Hunayn war, the Prophet had given me something. Truly, he was the person whom I hated most but he always gave me (something) until he really became the person that I love most"

The hadith mentioned above explained that Rasulullah s.a.w had transformed Safwan who hated him most at first, but through love, care and material showered on him by Rasulullah s.a.w, his hatred changed to love. Anas Ibn Malek narrated:

"Truly, the Prophet never asks anything except for the importance of Islam unless he was definitely able to fulfil it. Once, a man come and asked him something, he then was told to take a large part of the Zakat, (goats) which occupied land between two mountains. So, the men went back to his people and said: My people, all of you should embrace Islam, for Muhammad (loves) gave something as though a person was afraid of hunger".

As a result, almost all of the Islamic scholars agree the non-Muslim as a part of new convert as a way to persuade them to embrace Islam. Al-Qurtubi (1954) [9] mentioned three of them, which are:

- Those who have just embraced Islam and they need support in order to build up their confidence towards Islam. Al-Qurtubi also included the Jews and Christians who had newly accepted Islam, even though they were rich in the group.
- Leaders and public figures amongst them who had many friends who were non-Muslims that can attract them and their friends and get them to embrace Islam.
- The middlemen who can persuade other non-Muslims to embrace and accept Islam such as an act of war. On this matter, they received a part of the *Zakat* to become such a middleman.

Why Muslims must Care for New Convert?: The most difficult phase for a new convert is to share it new religion with his family. Most of new convert will feel guilty amongst their family and relatives and being afraid of being rejected [10]. Families can be very reluctant to accept their children religious conversions because they can think that they have lost their children or because of their common misconceptions about Islam such as violence and women's rights [11]. Family members will protest, devastated and agree with the conversion and worst when there is anti-Islam in the family member. Further, the new Muslims will even feeling guilt at their family because of what an embarrassment for their family to have somebody who's doesn't fit their status, religion and cultural among the family.

Since September 11, 2001 booming episode, there are numerous misunderstandings and stereotypes about Islam, Muslims and connect them with terrorist [12]. This misunderstandings and stereotypes caused deep distress within Muslim communities and those converting to Islam come across these prejudices that certainly build fear within them. The misunderstandings and stereotypes therefore need to be constantly challenged and addressed though the New Convert obviously needs the time and space to be able to know and understand Islam so that he understand about the misconceptions and becomes confident about his conversion.

New converts mostly in non-Muslims country will experience the barriers of being part of minority. They

suffer the changing attitude of people amongst them. They report that as formerly part of the majority, they never had to face before this kind of hatred, attitudes and behaviours [13]. Barriers in job or other their economics sources can cause them to be poor, barriers on relationships among the family will results in feeling abundant and barriers among the Muslims itself will make them feel rejected. As the closes and becoming brothers in Islam, the Muslims is responsible in supporting them mentally and monetarily.

After conversion, most of new convert will feel lost regarding find teacher or resources to effectively live their faith. However, most of them will encounter a problem of fell being rejected (ethnicization) by the Muslims [14]. For example, if they entering a mosque, they will attract the attention of other Muslims such as they are doing something wrong by entering the Mosque although at that time they are already a Muslim. For most of the Mosque, they may find that cultural identity is stronger than religious standards and they feel difficult to be integrated with other Muslims. Moreover, some Muslims who are still learning about Islam did not know which branches of Islam they should refer to and/or are not well aware of the different movements and/or do not have an entire understanding of the principles of Islam.

New Muslims will also be facing practical issues when embracing a new way of life which is also differ from their previous way of life. Some of the issues may include their relationships with non-Muslims may change due to fear and preconceptions about Muslims and marriage with a non-Muslim [15]. These practical issues may have the greatest impact for New Muslims and such support at a practical level is therefore important.

In a worst-case scenario, converts might feel so discouraged that they have second-guessed about their decision to become a Muslims. With all the problems that arise after conversion and lack of morale and material support, there is a sense of desperation that can lead to apostasy [16]. While some of it is unavoidable, there is much that our communities as well as *Zakat* institution can do to help our converts feel welcomed and strong as Muslims. Most of it requires simple attitude changes like getting rid of the "back-home" mentality and having outrageous ideals that don't reflect reality. Figure 1. shows the apostate application in Malaysia from 2000 - 2010.

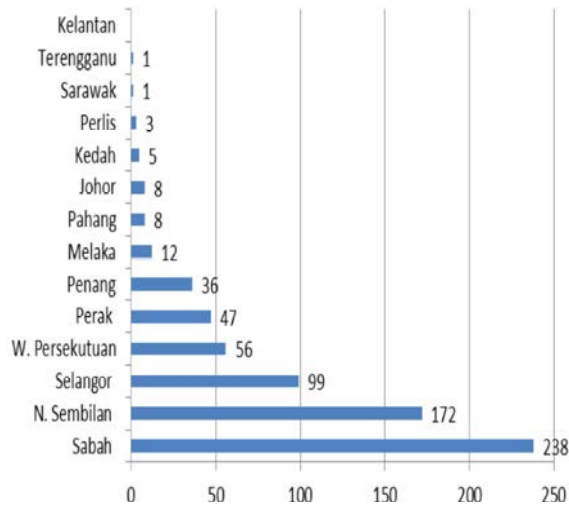


Fig. 1: Apostate application in Malaysia from 2000 - 2010
Source: Malaysiakini, Jun 14, 2011

The Important of Zakat Distribution among New Convert: Allah s.w.t had brought *Zakat* system as an economic solution for the Muslims in supporting New Converts in terms of their monetary and morally hardness as stated in Al-Qur'an (9:60). *Zakat* distribution can improve their economic and social hardness by reducing their burden of poverty while at the same time making them feel accepted among the Muslims community [17]. The institution of *Zakat* purifies one's heart from the love of material, wealth and prepares it to make sacrifices for the cause of Allah. *Zakat* functions as a fiscal mechanism, it performs some of the major functions of modern public finance, which deals with social security entitlements, social assistance grants for childcare, food subsidy, education, health care, housing and public transportation in a welfare state [18]. Since *Zakat* reallocates the resources from the rich to the poor, it becomes the effective approach to fight against poverty [19].

Converting to Islam had become the biggest decision made by the New Convert in their life. There are a lot of stimuli around them that they are not used to, being thrown out of family, society, friends as well as loss their job and loss their financial sources. Often, new Muslims might look uncomfortable because they are not used to their surroundings. Thus, they need help and mentors from Muslims community to teach them, support them and guide them through their new journey as a Muslim. When they have someone that has warned them about these issues and is constantly helping them, teaching them and answering questions, they feel supported and confident

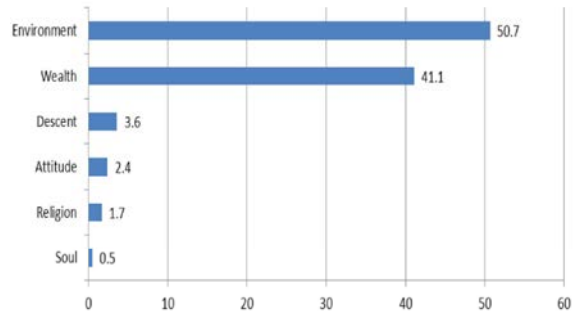


Fig. 2: New Convert perception to Apostates in Selangor (2002 - 2012)
Source: Department of New Convert Development, MAIS, Aidit Ghazali & Zulkifli Abdul Hamid, 2012

that they have someone to go back to [20]. This is where *Zakat* assistant is important to assist them materially and morally besides the support from the Muslims community itself. The lack of support will leave the new Muslim feeling isolated and unaware. Attempting to go through any combination of these issues alone without any support is often the reason why many new Muslims end up leaving Islam. In recognizing and highlighting these issues, the need for effective *Zakat* distribution becomes blatantly clear.

Human who are being stricken with poverty can result of being apostates. Assistant that comes from other religion or missionary will allure them to convert out from Islam. Further, today's high cost of living prompted most of poor New Convert to be apostates. It is worst for the female or single mothers who are not working and have to be separated by his husband [21]. Rasulullah s.a.w. said about the fact of life that being plagued by poverty and poverty is a disease that may cause one can become disbelievers [22].

We cannot deny the important of human needs and wealth in every human life. Human that life in poverty is vulnerable to be apostates. The phenomena of apostates had increase from years to years and the highest case of apostates comes from New Convert who wish to convert back his first religion [23] Based on study from Selangor Religious State on 2011, there are five perceptions for New Convert to convert back to their old religion as shown in

From the figure we can see that wealth become the second reason most of the new convert being apostates in Selangor. In fact, there is also a certain parties with a hidden agendas seeking to attract the new convert to return to thier original religion by threat or obscure them

with moral assistance and financially rewarding. This situation would only endanger the faith of the converts New Convert.

Most of new convert turns to Islam because of several reasons such as marriage, attract with the wholesomeness of Islam and *Zakat* assistant in Islam [24] [25]. As one of the attraction for Islam, *Zakat* distribution must become the tools for attracting the non-muslims by providing assistant that can soften their heart beside increase their faith and believe to Allah s.w.t.

Zakat distribution also can become a tool to assist the new convert for them in gaining knowledge and education about Islam. Most of them will have a constraint in terms of time and money in gaining the knowledge about Islam. However through *Zakat* distribution free religious learning class can be organized as well as giving the allowance for attending the class for encourage them to attend the class. Besides providing the new convert with Islamic education and preparing them to be teacher for their family and society, the *Zakat* assistant also reduce their poverty by giving them allowance that can prevent them from asking money or help from their old religion family, relative and friends.

Literature Review: *Zakat* and New Convert Development:

Mahyuddin Haji Abu Bakar *et.al* (2011) states that *Zakat* allocation to the new convert can help strengthen their faith and creates a sense of belonging among Muslims to assist those who are in need like this group of people [26]. Aishah M *et al* (2011) seeks to investigate the conversion patterns among new converts in Malaysia. Its focus is to find out the demographic information of new converts and to identify the popular conversion patterns among new converts in Malaysia. From the study conducted, he conclude that: a) majority of the new converts come from Sabah and belongs to other races found in Malaysia such as Iban, Asli, Myanmar, Kadazan and Thai, b) many of them are unemployed despite having adequate academic level, c) majority of the new converts agree that they get the first source of information regarding Islam from people who are close to them like family members, friends, colleagues and neighbours, d) majority of the new converts associate their conversion process with the friendliness pattern, followed by the intellectual pattern and lastly the mystical pattern. This coincides with the first source of information they obtain regarding Islam [27].

The objective of *Zakat* distribution is to reduce as well as eliminate the poverty-stricken by making the Asnaf (*Zakat* Recipient) affords to live in comfortable life

[28]. Al Kasani (n.d.) is also mention that the distribution of *Zakat* serves to cater for the needs of its recipient. For this purpose, *Zakat* does not necessarily be given to all recipients if there are those who need more *Zakat*. According to him, the government has the power to identify the ways to distribute *Zakat* [29]. Monzer Khaf, (1989) stated that *Zakat* fund can become a substance to assist the Muslims in resolving their poverty issue, creating a strong muslims brotherhood, establish social justice and to eliminate from the poor feelings of hatred that they might have to the rich [30].

Razaleigh Muhamat *et al* (2012) set outs to explore the exact level of the social aspect of assimilation between Chinese new convert and their Malay counterparts in Kuala Lumpur. It was sure that assimilation in social aspect is a dilemma which Chinese new convert faces when they convert from their own religion to Islam. He suggests that when these converts begin to practice Islam, their behaviour changes in line with the identity of the Malays. This is because Islam associates to Malay in the Malaysian context. Whilst they are welcomed by their Malay counterparts, it is nevertheless hypothesized that they may not assimilate fully into the Malay community. Through this research the social assimilation level of Chinese new convert is at the low level [31].

Lofland & Skonovd (1981) [32], describe the process of conversion from one religion to another; a) Intellectual; 'response to teaching' [33] through reading, media, talks, b) Affection; through having good and positive personal experience with members of the Muslim society, c) Mystical; through visions and supernatural experiences, d) Experimental; going through the process of trial and error in the religion of choices, e) Revivalist; conforming to the crowd; involving emotional inspirations [34]; and f) Coercive; through pressure.

Meanwhile, Poston (1992) came up with four factors of conversion: "Example and imitation, the desire to follow out a moral idea, teachings of Islam and extra cult-affective-bonds" [35]. While Abdul Wadod Shalabi (2005) further added three common factors that lead to the decision to convert to Islam: "Direction and discipline, lack of a priesthood and racial equality" [36]. However, Dawson (1990) suggested that conversion process is 'a mixed type' of those patterns [37]. In 1992, Bainbridge pointed out two theories on religious conversion; a) strain theory, b) social influence theory and Lofland/Stark (1965) conversion model brings about both of the theories [38]. In Kose's (1994) study on 70 English Muslim converts, it was found that the most common conversion patterns among them were the affection, intellectual and

experimental. Among the three, most respondents associated their conversion with the affection and intellectual patterns [39].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper has is essentially based on the on-going academic research work and descriptive analysis to get an overview of the new convert development through *Zakat* allocation and programmes in current situation. An interview session was conducted on 25 June 2013, 3.30 pm with two officers from The Selangor Islamic Religion Department which are Ustaz Mohd Helmi (Assistant Director for New Convert Welfare in Selangor) and Ustaz Mohd Anwarulhaq (Assistant Director for New Convert Education in Selangor). The purpose of this interview session is to get the answer of the research question that been raised in this research. Data collection also stated for the period of 2002 until 2012.

The Selangor Islamic Religion Department (MAIS) was been chosen because of their performance as the highest in collecting the *Zakat* fund in Malaysia. Question been point it out that as the highest collection of *Zakat* in Malaysia, by the Muslims still put blame and complaint to the Selangor Islamic Religion Department on where is the *Zakat* collection been allocated. The attentions also focus on whether the *Asnaf* New Convert has been protected accordingly through *Zakat* funds. Malaysia was shaken by the controversial issue on the discovery of converted Muslim (new convert / new Muslim) being under arrest by Selangor Islamic Religious Department while doing inspection based on the complaint received by Muslim on their involvement with activities organised by the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) in Petaling Jaya on August 3, 2011 [40]. Majority Muslim put blame on the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (SIRD) and question on the New Convert's Right on *Zakat* contribution. The blame was stress on where the *Zakat* fund goes as their perception was that these new convert is not being supported by the authority. Thus, this study aims to identify the programmes or activities that involved in allocation of *Zakat* mainly for the *asnaf* new convert.

Potential of *Zakat* in Assisting the New Convert: a Malaysia Case: Islam is the official religion of the country as stated by the Federal Constitution. The power to enact Islamic laws such as *Zakat*, waqf and other Islamic religious revenue are under the jurisdiction of every state. The state is fully authorized to establish enactments to

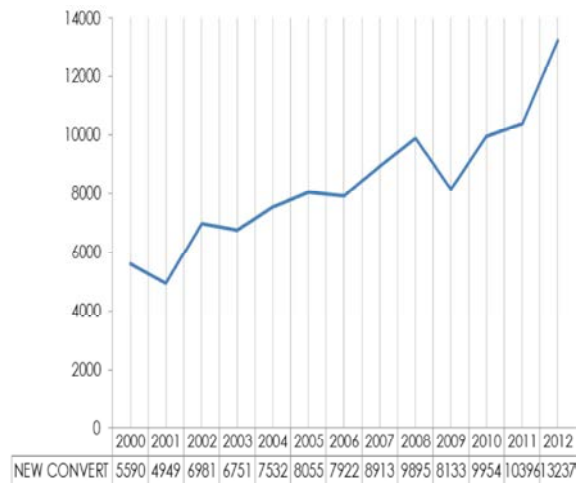


Fig. 3: Malaysia: New Coverts (2000 - 2012)

Source: State Islamic Religious Department (Various Issues) Da'wah Department, JAKIM (data until Februari 2013)

ensure smooth functioning of Islamic practices in the states including the laws on *Zakat* and supervising the operation of *Zakat* through the State Religious Council. The mechanism of wealth transferring mentioned above is carried out by formal *Zakat* institutions and sometimes it is distributed directly by the *Zakat* payers to the *asnaf* or recipients of the *Zakat*. In Malaysia there are 14 *Zakat* institutions under the religious department of various states. In principle, the main role of *Zakat* institutions is to distribute wealth from *Zakat* payers to the *asnaf*. *Asnaf* comprises the poor, destitute (needy), *amil* (*Zakat* collector), *New Convert* (newly converted Muslim), *al-gharimin*, *fi sabilillah* (striving in the path of Allah), *ar-riqab* (slave) and *ibn-sabil* (needy traveller). Among these eligible recipients, the new convert are one of the prime targets of *Zakat* institutions as they are assumed to be among the neediest.

In Malaysia, the number of new coverts is reported to increase from year to year. The number throughout the ten years since 2000 until 2010, the figure had double from 5590 in 2000 to 9954 and it continue to increase to 13237 in 2012 (Figure 3). The increase number of new converts required an impressive effort from Islamic Religious Department in spreading the Islam although the needs for supporting and educating them required a great amount of fund. Thus *Zakat* fund can play an important economic role for funding their economic and education programs.

The performance of collection is very impressive in Malaysia. Thus, it opens more opportunity for *Zakat* management to plan and organize various assistant and

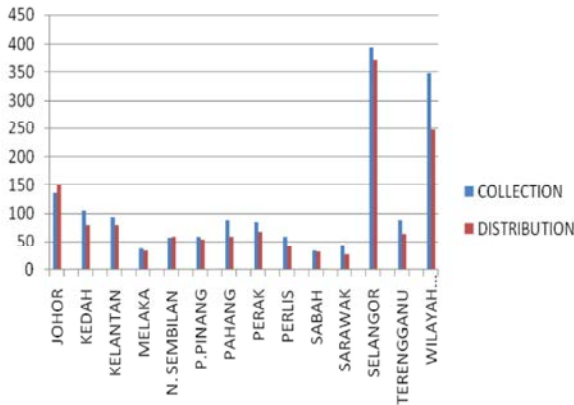


Fig. 4: Malaysia: Zakat Collection and Distribution (2011) (RM Million)
Source: JAWHAR 2012

activities in reducing poverty and providing education towards new converts [41]. *Zakat* funds could be used to create a pull of funds which can be used in financing development activities and can replace government expenditures. For example from the year 2011 until 2012, *Zakat* collection has increase from RM 15.65 million to RM 40.62 million [42]. This has shown on how much does *Zakat* funds will creates more chances on reducing and eliminating the poverty in Malaysia. Figure 4 and Table 1 shows the *Zakat* collection and distribution in 2011.

Table 1 shows that in the year 2009, the amount of *Zakat* collection has increased from RM 101 million in 2008 to RM 109 million in the year 2009. This amount further increased in the year 2010, whereby the amount of *Zakat* collection increased to RM 122 million. Increasing amount of *Zakat* collection continue with RM 137 million in the year 2011. The performance is also indicative the trust placed upon *Zakat* Department by the *Zakat* payers. Besides that, the amount of *Zakat* distribution also has a positive pattern as it is increasing throughout the period under study, 2008 to 2011. Throughout the years, the *Zakat* distribution shows an increasing trend from 2008 with RM 74 million to RM151million in 2011 of *Zakat* was distributed. Further, based on the eight categories of *Zakat* recipients as stated in the Quran (9:60), *Zakat* State Institution had made a progressive effort in distributed the *Zakat*.

The trend of *Zakat* collection in Malaysia shows potential of *Zakat* becoming among the major sources of finance especially to the Muslim society. Although the contribution of *Zakat* is only less than 1% compared to nation’s Gross Domestic Production [43], but *Zakat* play

Table 1: Malaysia: *Zakat* Collection and Distribution (2008 - 2011) (RM Million)

State	2008		2009		2010		2011	
	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D
Johor	101	74	109	97	122	115	137	151
Kedah	53	42	68	56	77	66	106	80
Kelantan	58	24	67	56	70	65	94	80
Melaka	27	21	31	32	34	30	38	34
N. Sembilan	37	37	42	41	50	52	58	59
P. Pinang	42	46	48	52	53	54	60	54
Pahang	58	22	72	47	81	59	89	60
Perak	57	37	67	60	70	67	86	68
Perlis	23	16	25	27	38	30	59	43
Sabah	24	19	25	24	33	26	34	32
Sarawak	36	18	37	24	39	24	44	27
Selangor	244	189	284	277	337	330	394	372
Terengganu	66	36	74	53	76	62	88	65
W. Persekutuan	211	168	249	175	282	201	347	247

Source: JAWHAR, 2012;
C - Collection; D - Distribution

Table 2: *Zakat* Collection vs Government Revenue (2002-2010) (Rm Million)

Year	GDP ¹ (b)	<i>Zakat</i> Collection ² (c)	Percentage ³
2002	383,213	331.47	0.08%
2003	418,769	408.4	0.09%
2004	474,048	492.32	0.10%
2005	522,445	573	0.11%
2006	574,441	670.6	0.12%
2007	642,049	806.3	0.13%
2008	742,470	1,038	0.14%
2009	679,938	1,196.9	0.18%
2010	765,965	1,341.4	0.19%

Source:
¹Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2012.
²JAWHAR, Jabatan Perdana Menteri.
³[(c)/(b)] X 100

an important role in providing necessities and social survival to the poor people. The main objective of *Zakat* is to eliminate poverty and is parallel with the government’s fourth Malaysia’s National Key Result Areas (NKRA) in Government Transformation Program (GTP), to improve the standard of living low income. Financial aids from *Zakat* institution provide opportunities to uplift themselves to higher socioeconomic levels. Table 2 presents the performance of the *Zakat* collection in comparative to the government revenue in Malaysia for a period of 2002 - 2010.

Based from Table 2, throughout the year of 2002 to 2003, the amount of total *Zakat* collection in Malaysia is less than 0.1 per cent of the total government revenue, which is very insignificant. However, the amount continues to grow and in 2005, the percentage exceeds 0.1

per cent and in 2010 it closes the 0.2 per cent. Table 2 also indicates that *Zakat* collection does not positively correlate with GDP collection. We can see that in the year 2008 - 2009 the Malaysia GDP has a downward from RM 742,470 million in 2008 to RM 679, 938 million in 2009. However, *Zakat* collection still arising from RM 1,038 million in 2008 to RM 1,196.9 in 2009. The percentage between GDP and *Zakat* Collection also continue to increase throughout the recession years from 0.14 per cent in 2008 to 0.18 per cent in 2009. It shows that *Zakat* collection does not achieve its maximum collection due its capability in increasing during a recession period.

Success Story of New Convert: New convert are among the people chosen by Allah s.w.t to embrace, understand and feel the beauty of Islam and blessed them with the opportunity to enjoy the love from Him. Besides becoming the new learners of Islam, some of them are able to become missionaries in spreading Islam to the entire community [44]. New convert like Dr. Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, Ustaz Farid Ravi Abdullah, Ustaz Ann Wan Seng, Ustazah Nur A'ithiroh Masyaa'il Tan Binti Abdullah @ Tan Ai Pao and Ustaz Daud Lin Abdullah had become the role model for New Convert and most of them had become Islamic scholar.

Indeed, Allah had blessed them with true path (Islam) and knowledge. Thus, the contribution of *Zakat* among the New Convert cannot be denied in terms of monetary, spiritually and educating them. According to Mohammad Yusoff (2012), *Zakat* spending and school enrolment is important determinants of economic growth. The *Zakat* spending and student enrolment could significantly explain the variation in the growth of real output represented by the growth in real GDP. Therefore, he suggested that all Muslim countries must improve the efficiency of *Zakat* collection and spend it prudently [45].

Previous success new convert is some prove of the important of empowering the *Zakat* institution to become one of the symbols of success agencies in Islam. As one of the several instruments instituted by Islam to combat and enhance welfare in the society, *Zakat* helps generate an educated Muslims society through funding the knowledge acquiring and in long terms the knowledge will be spread to other society by the New Convert as well.

DISCUSSION

New converts Muslims have just made the biggest decision of their lives and changed their religion as well as their way of live to one that they are unfamiliar with in

many ways. There are a lot of stimuli around them that they are not used to, being in the mosque, hanging out with Muslims, hearing foreign languages (Arabic) other than their native language. Often, new Muslims might look uncomfortable because they are not used to their surroundings. A big change has just occurred in the convert's life and each person will respond differently to these situations. While they are learning the basics of Islam, either before or after our *Shahadah* (testimony of faith), they will constantly coming across new things that they have never heard of before. It takes a long time to be able to have a consistent foundation that's strong enough to feel any amount of comfort in the religion. This process is similar to moving to a foreign country, not knowing the language, customs, or environment that surrounds us. They often have no idea about the origin of certain customs and whether it comes from Islam or a person's culture and it takes time to be able to discern between the two.

Zakat has a significant economic impact on society mostly on new convert by taking a certain percentage of one's wealth is spent annually over the foregoing eight categories as prescribed in the Qur'an. Income support provided to the new convert would result in a measured increase of the money supply in the economy causing upward shift in demand for goods and services. To support this upward shift in the demand for basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter, the production facilities would gradually expand and begin to absorb the idle capital. To support the increased production, the economy would generate more jobs and new employment opportunities. This added employment in turn would generate more demand for goods and services, more room for additional investments and finally, the growth cycle based on balance consumption would contribute to a balance economic growth [46].

When a person accepts Islam, aside from the peace and contentment they gain from submitting to Allah's way, they are also heading themselves into an entire new lifestyle and belief system. *Shahadah* is only the first step of the journey and what follows it is not always an easy path. On top of this, they are most likely dealing with one or more of the following issues: Problems with family, being kicked out of their residence, drinking or drug issues, poverty, work related challenges, or any number of other things. As top of that they also will have to deal with drama from the Muslim community itself. Common issues include being pressured to change everything about their life overnight, being judged for not yet wearing *ijab* or dressing properly, accusations of being a

spy because of their non-Muslims heritage and many other issues. The effectiveness of *Zakat* administration can make them feel acceptance among Muslims after being neglect by their family, relative and friends.

CONCLUSION

The growth in conversions in the past decade is partly a reflection of social and geopolitical changes in Malaysia and the world during the past 10 years. Prior to 11 September 2001 there was relatively little press attention given to Islam. Following the attacks there was an understandable rise in focus on the faith, which led non-Muslims to want to find out more about the religion that was now so often in the news. A common thread in converts' stories was that something was missing in their lives beforehand and Islam then provided some stability in the midst of existential turbulence. The challenge for *Zakat* administration department, mosques and other Muslims is to ensure that those who are expressing keenness towards Islam get the right guidance so their curiosity does not turn them into cannon fodder at the hands of extremists happy to exploit the vulnerable.

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