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Mahathir-Islam

MAHATHIR TELLS MUSLIMS TO BE TOLERANT AND MODERATE

By: Azman Ujang

CAIRO, May 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Literature by the world's oldest university here Saturday, said Muslims will become weak and oppressed and have only themselves to blame if they do not practise tolerance and moderation.

The prime minister said while there is so much intolerance among Muslims as well as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists elsewhere, Muslims in Malaysia which form just about 60 percent of the population, believe in moderation and tolerance because that is just what Islam tells them to be.

"This is reciprocated by the majority of the non-Muslims. Tolerance and moderation have therefore paid off handsomely for Muslims in Malaysia. We see not just a religious dogma in the teachings of Islam but truly a good way of life," he said in receiving the award, the first by the 1,000-year old Al-Azhar University to a foreign head of government in 30 years.

Dr Mahathir said he accepted the invitation to speak at this ancient seat of Islamic teachings because he holds strongly to Islam but regrets the perceptions about it by non-Muslims and Muslims which have led to Islam and Muslims being vilified, being associated with unsavoury activities and even made fun of.

"Our religion is perfect but we are not perfect. It is our imperfections and refusal to adhere to the true teachings of Islam that has led us to the decline and to the unfortunate circumstance that Muslims worldwide are in today," he said in a lecture entitled "Toleration and Moderation in Islam" before a distinguished audience of Egypt's Islamic scholars and a few hundred Malaysian students.

The prime minister, on the second of his three-day official visit to Egypt, said all the perceptions and vilification of Islam are not due to Islam itself but to the interpretations given to it by Muslims and non-Muslims with vested interest wanting to justify the wrongs that they have done or intend to do.

He made many references and quoted Quranic verses regarding the tolerance and moderation preached by Prophet Muhammad including to members of his family who did not embrace Islam and to his enemies, which won over the hearts of the Arab Peninsula, which made all of them embrace Islam and be united into one ummah.

" From then on the spread of Islam as a faith and as a motivating spirit to build an empire could no longer be resisted. Such was the significance and the miracle wrought by moderation and tolerance for Islam and the ummah," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if Muslims want to correct the image and the wrong perceptions of Islam that is now common worldwide, they must demonstrate a willingness to forego the desire for revenge and for unmitigated violence.

In an obvious reference to the protracted search for peace in the Middle East coupled with the faltering peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the prime minister said: " Killing each other and killing others in order to emphasise the depth and strength of our commitment to our struggle may succeed in drawing attention to our grievances, but they will not lead to the success of our struggle.

" We know that the more the injustice and the oppressions that are heaped upon us, the greater will be our determination to fight on. Similarly, the more we inflict the same on our enemies, the more determined they will be. And the greater will be their resistance.

" We will not win that way unless of course it is not winning or success that we are after but the desire to seek revenge for the sake of revenge, to satisfy our animal desires," he said.

Turning to killings between fellow Muslims themselves, he asked: " How can we pray and then go forth to seek revenge against fellow Muslims by slaughtering them? They may not pray as much as we pray, but can we really know whether they have gained less merit than we have?. Only Allah will know who adheres more to the teachings of Islam, we or they."

He believed that Muslims have a duty to explain Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims alike and the best explanation is through demonstrating visibly the true teachings of Islam with regard to tolerance and moderation and the rejection of fanaticism and extremism.

The prime minister also cautioned Muslims worldwide that not all of them live in countries with a 100 per cent Muslim population as shown by more and more Muslims today living in non-Muslim countries in non-Muslim communities.

There are things that a 100 per cent Muslim community can do which cannot be done in a community in which the Muslim majority is small, or indeed in which they are in minority.

Those Muslims living in a purely Muslim country must remember that in this shrinking world, anything that is done in one Muslim community or country will affect the lives of other Muslim communities.

" We may in a largely Muslim country be tolerant and oppressive towards the few non-Muslims in our midst. But we must always remember that this may affect the lives of those Muslims who make up the minority in another country.

" We would not like these Muslim minorities in so many countries to suffer because of our actions against non-Muslims in our midst," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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