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`Propagate correct image of Islam'

MUSLIMS should correct the negative image of Islam through education and better quality literature, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies director Dr Farhan Ahmad Nizami said.

He said a correct and objective view of the Islamic world should be widely disseminated through education and publications to remove the misunderstandings and prejudices that might exist.

Farhan was speaking at the Malaysia-European Union Joint Seminar: "Europe and the Islamic World" organised by Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia and Ocis, supported by the EU.

The New Straits Times is the official newspaper while Radio Televisyen Malaysia is the official electronic media for the event.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the two-day seminar yesterday. Over 250 participants, including those from the EU, Malaysia and members of the diplomatic corps, attended the ceremony which was telecast live over RTM1.

Also present were EU representative, Michel Caillouet, the ambassador and head of delegation of the EC, Ikim chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid and Ikim director-general Datuk Dr Ismail Ibrahim.

Participants include Dr Nico Landman from Utrecht University, Professor Bo Utas from Uppsala University and Professor Marco Lombardi from Universita Cattolica and Professor James Piscatori from Ocis.

Farhan said there was insufficient participation of Muslim scholars to the tradition of learning and that they should contribute more objective and scholarly works that dispelled distortions of the past.

In parts of Western Europe, such as France and Britain, Islam had become the second largest religion, he said.

"It is up to the Muslims in Europe to realise the challenges, to seize the opportunities available and be confident in retaining their identity. The Muslims have to adapt and contribute to Europe with confidence.

"You cannot have a situation that people, as it were, were constantly apologising. This would not be right."

In his speech, Farhan said the moderate, pragmatic and flexible policies developed by Malaysia had given rise to "an active and dynamic Islam that neither condemns nor excludes.

"There is much for us to learn from the experience of Malaysia that is relevant to the wider relationships between the European and Islamic worlds."

Farhan later chaired the "Islam, Malaysia and Europe: Historical Links and Mutual Influence" plenary session with speakers, University of Malaysia associate professor Muhammad Abu Bakar and professor Dr Udo Steinbach, director of the German Oriental Institute.

Speakers at the "Islam, Malaysia and Europe: The Need for Bridge Building" plenary session were International Islamic University deputy rector (Academic Affairs) Professor Mohd Kamal Hassan who is currently Georgetown University visiting professor and ambassador Ingmar Karlsson, Swedish Embassy Prague.

In his paper, Mohd Kamal said the first step in the building of bridges is the acknowledgement of interdependency in the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world.

He said the next step would be "to remove the prejudices and preconceptions in our minds and cultures through a sincere attempt at

understanding the other side."

"A superficial understanding is sometimes more dangerous than pure ignorance, but provides for a fragile foundation upon which no lasting edifice could be constructed."

In this respect, he said, Malaysia was uniquely blessed as the country's Muslim population and political elite were accustomed to the interaction of the major religions.

"Malaysia's distance from the more violent prone regions of the world make her a suitable candidate for bridging the good that is in the West and the good that is in the East."

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