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US-Imam

NO CENTRES TO TRAIN IMAMS, ISLAMIC LEADERS IN THE US

KUALA LUMPUR, June 6 (Bernama) -- The Muslim community in the United States is facing major problems in training imams and Islamic religious leaders in the absence of suitable training centres, Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, said today.

There was an increasing need to train imams and religious leaders who could cater to the needs of the American Muslim community, said Professor Ibrahim who is attached to the Hartford Islamic Seminary in the US.

"We have to train imams and religious leaders not just in Pakistan and Southeast Asia but also in America itself.... within the American context so that they can be leaders for the American Muslim community," he said when met by reporters after delivering a talk on "Islam and the West" here today.

The talk was organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) Malaysia.

Professor Ibrahim said in the US context, it was insufficient for the imams and religious leaders to know just Arabic but should also be fluent in English so as to understand the needs of Muslims especially children in the United States.

Unlike the US Christian community which had special institutions and training centres for priests, the Muslim community faced problems in training religious leaders to cater to the needs of the community.

Professor Ibrahim, whose area of study included Islamic studies, Modern Arab, Islamic Intellectual history, World Religions and Political Science, said there were about six million Muslims in the US including immigrants.

On traditional Islamic education centres such as the madrasah in Pakistan, which had been linked to terrorists and terrorism, he said traditional Islamic education and its curriculum needed to be reformed to meet the demands of the modern world.

"This traditional Islamic education is not up to the modern time, there need to be a reform in the traditional Islamic madrasah curriculum to meet the needs of the contemporary era and this is what the Muslim leaders had not paid attention to, so far," he said.

On the growing conflict between Palestine and Israel, Professor Ibrahim said the conflict could be resolved by establishing a Palestinian state.

Professor Ibrahim, who was born in Nazareth, Israel, was also asked about tomorrow's meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and head of the world's Roman Catholics, Pope John Paul II, at the Vatican City.

"I think it is very interesting to have Muslim and Catholic dialogue because the Pope is the most significant figure in the Roman Catholic Church."

"It is very important for Muslims to understand Christianity as well," Professor Ibrahim said.

-- BERNAMA

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