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Suhakam-Conference
SUHAKAM TO HOST DIALOGUE ON "ISLAMIC STATE"

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) is hosting a dialogue on the "Islamic State" in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, its chairman, Tan Sri Musa Hitam, said Tuesday.

The dialogue on the controversial issue would bring together a broad spectrum of Muslim and non-Muslim groups, political parties and non-governmental organisations, he said at a conference on Malaysia organised by Ohio University at the Malaysian embassy here.

"Malaysia in the 21st Century" is a two-day conference to celebrate 20 years of the Tun Abdul Razak Distinguished Chair at Ohio University.

Prof Datuk Dr Zakaria Ahmad is the 10th and current Tun Abdul Razak Chair in Southeast Asian Studies at the university.

Musa said that he was saddened by the fact that political parties were using race and religion as a "political football" with Umno and PAS jostling to be the champion of the "Islamic state".

The controversial issue was revived when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared Malaysia an Islamic state, which Musa said, rattled the non-Muslims.

Georgetown University's Prof Datuk Dr Osman Bakar said that the need for such a dialogue was urgent since several PAS leaders rejected the claim that Malaysia is already an Islamic state while the DAP has challenged the constitutionality of Dr Mahathir's declaration.

"If the same constitution is considered secular by some groups, and Islamic by other groups, then clearly there is an urgent need to have a national dialogue on the meanings of secular and Islamic," he said.

Osman, who regarded Dr Mahathir's declaration of Malaysia as an Islamic state as a "very historic event", said that if this was accepted, Malaysia would emerge as the only Muslim nation-state in modern times to have attained the status of an Islamic state through the democratic process.

Furthermore, the status was achieved in the context of a multi-ethnic and multireligious society where more than 40 per cent of the population is non-Muslim, he noted.

On the war on terrorism, Ambassador Datuk Ghazzali Sheikh Abdul Khalid said that it was evident that both Kuala Lumpur and Washington were cooperating closely since the Sept 11 assault on New York and Washington.

"If we attack terrorism at its source, and remove the incentives as well as its attraction for certain desperate peoples, we can truly eliminate it as a major problem for the world," he said in his opening remarks.

Musa, in a speech on "Terrorism: The Malaysian Experience" at Johns Hopkins University here, said that the West could learn from Malaysia's long war against communism.

"Like the fight against communism, you have to understand the language and ideology" to win over the minds and hearts of the people.

"I feel frustrated and angry that they don't understand Islam, the Quran or Arabic," he said during his speech Monday.

"I feel that the West is less credible when talking about human rights after 9-11 (Sept 11)... you sound like us and adopting what we're doing," he said.

The Bush administration has indefinitely detained hundreds of Muslim men in prisons in a round-up of terrorist suspects following the attacks.

The arrests of mostly Arab males or those bearing Arab names have

raised criticism from Muslim and non-Muslim groups which regard the arrests as an assault on American civil liberties.

-- BERNAMA

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