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Scholars-Conference

CONFERENCE TO SEEK FORMULA FOR REJUVENATION OF MUSLIMS' STRENGTH

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

PUTRAJAYA, July 6 (Bernama) -- The World Conference of Islamic Scholars, which begins here on Thursday, will seek ways to rebuild the strength of Muslims, whose honour has been challenged lately.

The Prime Minister's Religious Adviser, Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, sees the conference as the starting point for measures to strengthen Muslims' faith and to improve their capability to deal with the challenges of globalisation.

"This (conference) is not an ordinary meeting on Islam but an event which will discuss all issues related to Muslims and their future," he told Bernama in an interview here recently.

Dr Abdul Hamid said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his keynote address at the conference, was expected to delve into the rebuilding of a strong Islamic world, which had suffered humiliation when Iraq was invaded by foreign powers with the Muslim countries incapable of doing anything.

"Muslims should be in a position where they are safe from threats, be it internal or external, including from (other) Muslims who can weaken the Islamic community causing them to be controlled by others," he said.

The conference, from July 10 to 12, will be attended by close to 700 people, including 85 leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals from throughout the world. Egypt's Al-Azhar University Sheikh, Dr Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi, will be among the participants.

Apart from the ulama, local participants will comprise intellectuals, professionals, government officials and academics.

Dr Abdul Hamid said those invited to the conference were "agents of change", capable of disseminating Islamic thoughts for the people's development.

The conference at Putrajaya Marriott Hotel will see the tabling of 25 working papers on religion, politics, economy, development and social issues.

Among the working papers expected to draw attention are those on misinterpretation of religion, growth of extremist ideologies in the Muslim society and the role of the opposition in a Muslim nation.

On the misunderstandings which had caused a split among Muslims, Dr Abdul Hamid said this concern had been voiced many times by Dr Mahathir.

Said Dr Abdul Hamid: "He (Dr Mahathir) has talked of the need for Muslims to return to the basic teachings of Islam -- the fundamentals. Dr Mahathir has described himself as a fundamentalist, but fundamentalists are not terrorists."

"Hence all these misconceptions should be corrected," he said, adding that unity was the key factor in determining the rise and fall of Muslims.

Dr Abdul Hamid said returning to the fundamentals in Islam encompassed the mastering of knowledge and technology and the ability to manage human and natural resources.

He said some Muslims in Malaysia did not see the government's efforts to enhance knowledge and technology development for the country's growth as religious work.

Dr Abdul Hamid said there were people who uttered words like "I'm already old, so I can no longer support the government as I have to prepare for the hereafter."

"So it is as if the work we are doing in this country is not religious

work. This is among the misconceptions," he said.

He said the conference would set up a permanent secretariat to facilitate the use of Muslim scholars' thoughts as guidelines for the Muslim community.

The setting up of the secretariat had been agreed on in principle but the matter would be fine-tuned at the conference, he said.

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