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OIC-Kazakhstan (with pix)

KAZAKHSTAN SAYS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUES CAN PROMOTE GLOBAL PEACE

By P.Vijian

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- The solution to today's political and social woes lies in inter-religious dialogues, Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Kassymzhomart Tokaev said today.

He said religious tolerance and understanding were crucial in promoting peace in a rapidly changing world.

"Dialogues must prevail in the contemporary world," he told Bernama in an interview on the sidelines of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

"Without dialogue there will be no peace and no progress," said Tokaev, who will represent Kazakhstan at the summit to be chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Thursday and Friday.

Tokaev cited the International Religious Assembly held in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana last month as among his government's efforts to encourage inter-religious dialogues to promote peace and unity.

The assembly focused not on theological discussions but on the potential capacity of religion to contribute to global peace, he said.

"We must hold open, benevolent and unbiased dialogue. Religion is a very delicate subject and was many times a reason for conflicts and an instrument of reconciliation.

"Today, religion must be a tool for providing unification and friendship," Tokaev said. Kazakhstan, the ninth largest country in the world has a population of 14 million.

He said the 57-member OIC had an important role to play, not only for the Ummah but also for the world that is burdened with all sorts of predicaments.

"I think the OIC has to be changed, restructured and its efficiency upgraded. It must not only talk about the unity of the ummah but also about pragmatic practical issues like science and technology and trade. We have to facilitate bilateral and multilateral trade," he said, voicing confidence in Malaysia's leadership of the OIC for the next three years.

Touching on the current dilemma faced by the ummah, especially after the Sept 11 2001 terror attacks on the United States, he said Muslims must be more practical to change the tarnished image of Islam among the sceptics.

"The perception of Islam has been distorted but let us be frank and pragmatic. Probably we also made some mistakes by not enlightening and moderating Islam. We must start from ourselves, avoiding extremism and many isms...

He said the OIC, which represents nearly more than one billion Muslims, had a more important duty in protecting the ummah, especially after the 2001 tragedy in the United States.

"The OIC's focus has to change, especially in Central Asia, our region is becoming very important in contemporary international relations," he said.

In this aspect, Tokaev is confident that the OIC will become a more effective organisation under Malaysia's stewardship.

"There is no doubt that under Malaysia's leadership, the OIC will succeed. Even in such a short time Malaysia has done a lot," he said.

With a concrete agenda, like promoting bilateral trade and restructure of the OIC, the minister believes that Malaysia will overcome the challenges facing the organisation -- emerging discord among members which

in turn prevents the ummah from reaching a common ground on matters relating to the Muslims.

-- BERNAMA

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