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A good time to correct misconceptions about Islam

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WHILE Islam has always advocated tolerance and peace, the recent spate of bombings by extremists is sending out confusing signals to the world.

The OIC summit which begins on Oct 11 here is an opportune time to correct the misconceptions about Islam which is perceived as encouraging terrorism.

Indonesia's charge d' affaires in Malaysia, Suherman Obon, has suggested that OIC take the lead by demonstrating that Islam tolerates other religions. Suherman adds that Malaysia has clearly shown people with different religions can live peacefully together.

"True Islamic teachings have never endorsed terrorism," says Suherman who has been with the embassy in Kuala Lumpur for the past two years. Islam emphasises peace and harmony.

The Jemaah Islamiyah issue had reinforced these misconceptions, Suherman said. He gave an assurance that Indonesia would apprehend the culprits and bring them to justice. Suherman, who has also served as a diplomat in Pakistan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, says the Indonesian Government agrees terrorism cannot be completely wiped out unless the root causes - whether poverty, injustice or unilateral action - are addressed. Combating terrorism also means eliminating the core reasons for poverty, injustice and illiteracy, which implies protecting the true values of Islam.

Urging that terrorism be immediately halted, Suherman said Indonesia would like to see OIC endorse a single voice to condemn unilateral action against countries without the sanction of the United Nations Security Council.

Efforts to eliminate terrorism should never be discriminatory in nature, either on racial or religious grounds, he said.

Describing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a leader not only for Malaysia, but also someone who is vocal against injustice in the world, he hoped that the summit would play a more effective role to "promote the interests of its members, especially for the welfare and the peaceful existence of the Islamic community as well as the world".

Indonesia believes Malaysia, which has vast experience with international conferences, will make the OIC summit a success.

"OIC should achieve common grounds to face global challenges, especially a common approach to solve international problems, not only on political issues but also the economy, technology as well as social problems such as poverty, backwardness and illiteracy."

There is strength in unity and Suherman believes unity among the 57 OIC members is possible only if all work together towards sustainable development, peace, and stability. The OIC, he says, should endorse co-operation in various sectors such as economy, technical as well as in the information and communication technology sectors.

It should not only be discussing political matters but also the question of intensifying co-operation in economic issues.

"We have to push for smart partnership which will benefit all involved. The business communities should exploit opportunities to build strategic alliances to ensure development and progress," Suherman said. He was proud that Indonesia had played its role in promoting co-operation and solidarity among member States.

Suherman said as OIC's chairman of the Committee Eight, it had assisted the Mindanao Muslims in the southern Philippines in seeking a fair and

just solution via negotiations with the Philippine Government.

On the Middle East crisis, Suherman urged that all parties involved solve the problem through negotiations. The United States, European Union and Russia should guarantee that they will treat all parties involved on an equal footing. Such an approach would help the true teachings of Islam to pre-vail.

As for the OIC declarations, he said they should reflect and emphasise co-operation. "At the same time, it should stress the importance of unity, dignity, progress as well as the welfare of the world populace."