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Amina will not be expelled from conference

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The International Advisory Committee of the Second International Muslim Leaders' Consultation on HIV/AIDS today said Amina Wadud, accused of being blasphemous in her views, will not be expelled from the conference.

This decision comes after the special plenary session this morning to enable the party who called for her expulsion to express their views.

Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the chairman of IAC, said Amina's paper had been referred to the Islamic Development Department.

"It is a religious matter. Let Jakim decide on the status of Amina's paper," she said.

But she said removing Amina from the conference, to be held till Friday, was out of the question.

Marina also caused a stir when she resigned as IAC chairman, prompted by the many fingers pointing at her for "allowing" such an occurrence.

"Our intention was to create the space for open discussion, presenting the widest possible range of opinions from a diversity of speakers," said Marina.

But the conference rejected her resignation.

Marina said the conference should not merely focus on theology but also on applications relevant to the reality of the problem.

"While we are squabbling over this matter, millions are suffering from the epidemic - the issue is out there, not here in this hall."

At the heated special session, Gambian imam Sheikh Lee Baba said Amina should never have questioned the contents of the Quran, it being the ideal reference for solutions to problems faced by mankind.

He urged her to repent as she had belittled the religion and the Holy book.

Amina said it was up to her opponents to choose their interpretation as it was far from her intention to degrade the religion.

Jakim director-general Datuk Shahir Abdullah said the department would study the paper after the conference and decide if it should be banned.

Duke University Religion Department Professor Dr Ebrahim Moosa said: "We have humiliated ourselves in the whole process of this discussion.

"Those who accused her of blasphemy, refuted her points by saying that all answers lay in the Quran.

"But the Quran is only the beginning for us, a seventh century experience which offers general guidelines.

"One cannot distort history and claim that it has all the answers but must find ways to make the Quran work for mankind.

"These people suffer historical amnesia, all they are saying in an apologetic manner is that Islam is the perfect religion but they can't cite a verse in the Quran that could be used to fight the epidemic.

"The biggest problem in Islam now is that if one does not agree with that person's interpretation, that person has blasphemed Islam.

"That is not right."

Health Ministry Public Health Department Disease Control Division deputy director (AIDS/Sexually Transmitted Diseases) Datuk Dr Faisal Ibrahim said the incident allowed a deeper discussion among participants.