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Muslim scholars to propose ulama secretariat

PUTRAJAYA, Tues - The World Conference of Islamic Scholars will propose the establishment of a world secretariat of ulama to act as a body to collect and disseminate the thoughts of the world's Islamic scholars, especially on the implementation of the Syariah aspects of the faith.

Religious advisor to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman said it was hoped the secretariat would research and concentrate on methods that Muslim countries can take to manage their resources and alleviate poverty, both of which were elements of Syariah.

The secretariat would also act to spread the true understanding of Islam to correct extremist and narrow interpretations of the religion, which have caused a mental and spiritual crisis among the Muslims.

"We want the secretariat to act like a seminary where Islamic thinkers can come together and formulate solutions to the problems affecting Muslim countries, most notably in the areas of physical development and management, which are part of Syariah.

"At the same time we want to correct misinterpretations and misunderstandings spread by those studying religion," he said at a Press conference at his office here. Also present was Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia president and conference implementation committee chairman Datuk Nakhai Ahmad.

Hamid said the secretariat's membership would be worked out at a later date but stressed that they would be opinion leaders and thinkers in the Islamic world. They would also be moderate, with experience in fields such as economics and management.

The location and organisation of the secretariat would be discussed at a later date. It was the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he said.

"We have also not determined who will be the secretariat's first chairman, maybe Dr Mahathir himself."

He added the establishment of the secretariat had already been agreed to by the governments of countries participating in the conference.

On the conference, Hamid said it would be held here from July 9 to 12 and 600 representatives from 40 Muslim and non-Muslim countries would take part.

Sheikh Al-Azhar Dr Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi is scheduled to deliver a keynote address, while Dr Mahathir is scheduled to deliver a policy speech. The conference will be closed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Prominent scholars expected to attend the conference include those from Syria, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, India, France, England and the United States.