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Muslims must make their views known

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MUSLIMS should formulate their own model of national development to present to the world that they are a civilisation and not just a faith with its own set of rituals.

In making the call, Institute for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World director Fathi Osman said Muslims must make known to the world their views on social justice, democracy, economics, human rights and the status of women as befitting a civilisation.

"When they present themselves in this way, others may respect them despite being of a different faith," he said when interviewed before the World Conference of Islamic Scholars here.

He said Malaysia was a model of a successful Muslim country in the way it has promoted harmony and equality amongst the country's ethnic groups, how it has developed economically and how it has kept good relations with its neighbours and other countries.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a staunch critic of world affairs. But he does so constructively. Even non-Muslims in the United States media trumpet Malaysia as a moderate Islamic country, despite them being critical of it a few years back," Fathi who is based in the US, said.

Malaysia, he continued, was able to assert a Muslim identity while maintaining harmonious relations with all sections of its plural society.

He added that Muslims had the responsibility of convincing their fellow believers of the need to spurn harmful methods such as terrorism to achieve noble ends as this would negate the good that they were trying to achieve.

"Good ends require good means. You cannot achieve your ends if your means are damaging or bad ... I believe the first line of defence for Muslims are Muslims themselves."

Fathi said democracy was the only effective method to deal with extremism in Islamic countries as it provided legitimate channels such as political parties and a free Press with which individuals could express their feelings and grievances.

"This way they won't have to resort to using a gun to putting their points across. Terrorism thrives in despotic regimes where people are deprived of channels for expression. Under such conditions, people are driven to desperate measures.

The open check and balance system in democracy would allow society to expose those who would hijack the process to establish undemocratic regimes or those who misused the religion, he said.