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Promote true Islamic teachings, ulama urged

TRUE ulama (Islamic scholars) should re-orientate the beliefs of the ummah (Muslim community) towards the correct interpretation of the faith and dispel misconceptions spread by ulama who used the religion for their personal ends.

Commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech, Islamic scholars attending the conference said misinterpretation of the religion by wayward ulama was weakening and promoting infighting within the ummah.

General director of the Centre for Fiqh Research in Sudan Professor Sheikh Tigani Hassan said ulama who preached extremism and who used their influence to mislead the young should be eliminated as they posed a threat to the ummah.

He said there were many "imposter" ulama today who intentionally interpreted the religion to suit their own ends.

"The ulama are the catalysts between the ummah and society's top decision-makers. Unfortunately, some ulama are misleading the public through their preaching and this widens the gap between the public and society's decision-makers."

Tigani said it fell upon the ulama to be guided by their conscience and the true injunctions of Islam to use their influence responsibly and not for personal gain.

"The ball is in the ulama's court, as they are the ones who connect the two levels of society, the masses and its leaders."

International University of Lebanon vice-chancellor Husamuddine Quaraqirah said it was the ulama's responsibility to enlighten the ummah, promote the true teachings of Islam and help Muslims distinguish between the good and the bad.

"People must distinguish between ulama who preach true Islam such as those who promote peace, understanding and good relations between Muslims, and those who readily describe Muslims as blasphemous because the former do not agree with the latter's beliefs.

"There are extremists in Muslim society who think that they are right and others are blasphemous. This is wrong and society must distinguish between the two - between those who interpret the religion only to divide Muslims and those working for unity."

Dean of Postgraduate Studies for the International Islamic University Associate Professor Dr Zaleha Kamaruddin said ulama should use the conference as a platform to formulate mechanisms to unite Muslims.

Zaleha, one the speakers, said ulama should clear misconceptions among the ummah, especially those beliefs which had divided the community.

"The ummah has been infiltrated by certain groups of people whose only purpose is to divide Muslims and make them fight each other. We should be wary of these groups and expunge them and their beliefs."

On Dr Mahathir's call for Muslims to pursue knowledge and fulfil their collective obligations (fardhu kifayah), Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation Professor Dr Ala'eddin Kharofa said there was a need for Muslims to pursue worldly knowledge such as medicine and science, as such expertise was needed in society.

"Even in the Quran, it states that not everyone has to be an expert in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), because if everyone is, then who is going to tend to the sick or who is going to build the cities?"

Husamuddine said there should be a balance between the pursuit of collective obligations and personal obligations (fardhu ain).

"The key to developing the ummah is the balancing of these two."