

23/05/2003

Speaker retracts paper that some delegates took offence to

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Controversial speaker Dr Amina Wadud surprised participants of the Second International Muslim Leaders' Consultation on HIV/AIDS when she announced that she would voluntarily retract her paper which some delegates considered blasphemous.

The associate professor of Islamic studies from Virginia Commonwealth University told the packed room that she did not want the paper to cause "anymore problems".

"While I reject the claims that questioned my love for Allah, the Prophet or my faith and belief in the Quran, I apologise for the tone of my paper and its choice of words and analogies that may have been misconstrued and offended those present.

"This clearly was not the best forum for a paper of this nature," she said, adding that it was more for the purpose of questioning the possibilities rather than presenting positive suggestions.

Amina, whose working paper caused a stir and who was accused of blaspheming Islam on Tuesday, also apologised to HIV and AIDS sufferers, saying that neither admission nor withdrawal of her paper diminished their struggle for justice and dignity.

"I hold fast to the rope of Allah, accepting that He is One and has no partners. Only Allah can grant forgiveness. I ask for Allah's mercy and grace in this and all other matters," she said.

When asked about the controversy later, she said: "You have to ask the people what exactly was controversial as I have not read a single article on the accusations they made against me in local dailies.

"They had been impolite to me as a fellow Muslim and human being, and as such, I find it below my dignity to stoop to their level, so I did not indulge myself in reading the things they have said about me."

Amina said she rejected their actions, saying they were disruptive and showed disrespect to the host and Malaysians.

"My relationship with Malaysia goes back a long way and I appreciate the way people of this country handle things. I never wanted to be offensive even if it was unintentional on my part.

"My strengths and weaknesses are my own and I am aware of them. As a Muslim I believe there is room for improvement. I want to amend things in all ways I possibly can."

Amina was later surrounded by participants (including the group which was strongly against her paper and which had called for her expulsion) who shook her hand.

Gambian Imam Sheikh Lee Baba, who was seen talking to Amina, said he sought her forgiveness as he did not want Amina to think it was a personal attack.

The conference's International Advisory Committee chairman Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said Amina's initiative to issue an apology publicly was an incredibly generous gesture and was voluntary.

"Nobody suggested, persuaded or forced her to do what she did. But she found it in herself to make that sacrifice.

"I wish more people could be as humble as that," Marina said, adding she had been very emotional throughout the incident as it was dismaying to see a few people responsible for the controversy showing little humility in addressing the matter.