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`Time for ulama to focus on explaining real meaning of Islam'

Sheridan Mahavera; Roziana Hamsawi

SINCE the Sept 11 incident, most international media have implied that Islam is a religion that condones terror acts, said a Japanese Muslim Hideomi Muto.

Such reports, he said, have greatly influenced non-Muslims, including the Japanese, who believed in such reports.

Lauding the Malaysian Government for taking the initiative to hold an event such as the World Conference of Islamic Scholars, Muto said the time was right for ulama from the world over to focus on educating not just Malaysians on the real meaning of Islam, but those living elsewhere.

"I hope the next time such a conference takes place, the organiser will invite non-Muslim members of the media and observers so that they could understand that Islam advocates moderation and not extremism," he said yesterday.

Muto is the Syariah committee chairman of the Japan Muslim Association in Tokyo.

A convert since 1962, he said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is an exemplary leader of the Muslim world who has been very firm in stating that Islam should not be equated with terrorism.

A visiting professor at the Takushoku University, Muto said he had on many occasions given talks and lectures on Islam to correct the image that most Japanese seemed to have about the religion.

"But it is difficult to change this perception. I am not a famous person. Having someone like Dr Mahathir, who is not afraid to give his opinions even outside his country, can help non-Muslims to understand Islam better."

Muto said Japan has about 8,000 Japanese and 150,000 foreign Muslims.