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Perdana Menteri

EVENT: Majlis Perasmian Muktamar Islam Abad ke-15 Hijrah

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Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Saya mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih kepada Jawatankuasa Penganjur Muktamar ini, terutamanya Yang Berhormat Datuk Mohammad Nasir selaku Pengerusi Jawatankuasa, yang telah sudi menjemput saya menghadiri majlis ini. Saya juga mengucapkan setinggi-tinggi terima kasih di atas penghormatan yang diberikan kepada saya untuk merasmikan perhimpunan yang penting ini.

2. Muktamar ini, pada hemat saya, adalah amat penting dan sesuai sekali dengan suasana dan tujuan perayaan Abad Ke-15 Hijrah. Muktamar ini adalah ekoran kepada Seminar Kebangsaan Mengenai Konsep Pembangunan Dalam Islam yang dilangsungkan pada bulan Mac tahun ini. Saya mengambil peluang ini untuk mengucapkan tahniah kepada penganjur Muktamar dan semua pihak yang telah memberi kerjasama dan berusaha menyelenggarakan persediaan Muktamar ini. Semoga segala usaha dan titikpeluh semua pihak bagi menjayakan Muktamar ini akan diterima oleh Allah Subbhanahu Wataala sebagai amalan diredhai-Nya.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be given this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering of Muslim scholars and intellectuals gathered here to celebrate the advent of the 15th. Century of Hijrah in a manner most meaningful to Islam i.e by the serious discussion of the problems faced by Muslims in general and the spread of the teachings and practice of Islam among Muslims in particular. It is a symbol of Islamic ethical values that we do not make merry in our celebration of this significant event but instead we devote our time to the serious study of how to make Islam more and more a way of life of our Muslim brothers and sisters.

2. Perhaps I may be permitted to draw attention to the lesson of the Hijrah - the flight of our Prophet Mohammad s.a.w. from Mekkah to Madinah 1401 years ago. It was a flight from persecution - even from attempted murder by the treacherous Quraish. It could have been an inglorious episode. But instead the Hijrah marked such an important milestone in the spread of Islam that it was accepted as the beginning of the Islamic era.

3. The Hijrah is remembered and revered because it was not a retreat but rather a move or a manoeuvre to strengthen Islam. And indeed following the Hijrah to Madinah the spread of Islam gained momentum until eventually the faithful were able to return to Mekkah in victory. The Hijrah was indeed the turning point therein Islam which was confined to a few in Mekkah became the religion of 900 million people in the world to-day.

4. There is a lesson to be learnt here. Islam is not spread by battering our heads against stone walls, by obstinacy and foolhardiness and certainly not by arrogance and by force. Islam is spread by wisdom and strategy; wisdom to know and recognise our weaknesses as much as our strength, and knowing these, to plan our strategy. The weakness of to-day may be the strength of tomorrow. A step back may mean many steps forward later on. Allah is always with us, if only we will exert ourself to help ourself.

5. The Hijrah has inspired and sustained many Muslims even in the blackest hour. It has helped many to soldier on. I hop that the Hijrah will hold this meaning to all Muslims whether in defeat or in victory. There is no room for despair in our struggle for Allah is with us always.

6. As we gather here to ponder on the problems that to face in upholding the teachings and practice of Islam, our minds cannot help but be filled with memories of the Golden age of Islam - the age when civilization meant Islam and none other. The others were living in darkness when Islamic teachings raised man above the barbaric ways of their past.

7. But then this glorious period passed away and Islam at the beginning of 20th century of Al-Masihi was totally dominated or overshadowed by others. There was hardly a Muslim community which was not ruled by others or at least dominated. The Muslims were divided and fragmented and all their wealth was taken away from them. They became the poorest and the most dependent of people.

8. We can blame others for our fall from glory, for the sad fate of the Muslims and Islam. We can bewail the fact that our skills and our knowledge have been removed from us and copied. We can condemn the treachery of others. But all our outpourings and condemnation will be of no avail, for we have no power to force others to do what we want them to do for us.

9. If we are sincere and truthful to ourselves and to Islam we must admit that much of what was befallen us is due to our own fault as much as the glorious period of Islam was due to our practicing the true teachings of Islam. When Islam urges us to acquire knowledge we chose to divide knowledge into spiritual and non-spiritual knowledge. When Islam urges us to be prepared to defend ourselves we chose to ignore that war cannot always be fought with horses and camels and swords, that new weapons are needed. Consequently we were defeated. When Islam urges tolerance we chose to be arrogant and to force upon others that which we have no power to do. When Islam permits the acquisition of wealth and that giving is better than receiving, we chose to glorify poverty and honour those who beg from others. And there are many other things that we do and in fact preach which are contrary not only to the teachings of Islam but to its very spirit.

10. These are our faults and because of them we are now weak and have to beg for even the needs for defending Islam. Allah in His infinite wisdom has lately granted the Muslims untold wealth. But instead of seizing upon this opportunity to regain our strength we squander them

on needless luxuries while at the same time we quarrel over the right usage of such wealth. And so despite the bounty of Allah we are still dependent upon others for our well-being and our security.

11. This is of the theme of our Mukhtamar but I do not think it is our place to remind ourselves that our salvation lies with us, Isnya-Allah. We have no right to presume that Allah will provide for us merely because we are followers of the true religion and we perform the ibadah strictly and regularly. For Him to help us we have to make the efforts to help ourselves. If Allah so wished all the Quraish would have embraced Islam. But Allah sent Muhammad, Rasulullah s.a.w. to explain His Message and to show the light and Muhammad had to work at preaching Islam for 23 years before Allah declared that Islam was finally the complete religion. If the Prophet of Allah had to work, surely we who are mere followers of Islam, we with our weaknesses and our faults have to work even harder. Ibadah is not just the performance of fardhu 'ain. In Islam everything that we do for the sake of Islam is ibadah. Certainly the acquisition of knowledge, the willingness to work hard and to subject ourselves to discipline are all ibadah in Islam for they give strength and security to the Muslims and to Islam.

12. This Mukhtamar is concerned with dakwah and the problems associated with it. It is enjoined upon everyone of us to spread the correct teachings of Islam among the Muslims although among us there must always be a group of people who will call upon us to do what is good and to abstain from what is bad and to preach Islam. It is our duty, and the duty particularly of the ulamahs to solve the problems of dakwah.

13. The spread of the teachings of Islam among the Muslims should not really be a problem. We presume that the propagators of Islam would know what is the correct teaching and would only propagate what is right. But alas some of the followers of Islam are often ignorant and without the ability to distinguish what is right from what is wrong, and the propagators too might be ignorant or worse still might be moved by objectives other than sincere dakwah. Consequently wrongful and deviationist teachings are often propagated. This has been so not only now but throughout the history of Islam.

14. I am aware that there are scholars who advocate absolute freedom for anyone wishing to propagate Islam. It is not for me to say whether such absolute freedom is right or wrong. But we have today many sects which started among Muslims but which are now no longer recognised as Islamic. Still these sects flourish and still call themselves followers of Islam. And many are the people who are misled by these sects and have for practical purposes discarded Islam.

15. We now declare some of these sects as unIslamic and do not allow them to preach Muslims just as we do not allow the propagators for other religions to preach among Muslims. But if we say that we should be absolutely liberal, why do we prevent these people from preaching among us. We do so because we know that if these people are allowed to preach then some Muslims will be misled and confused and will no longer be Muslims who follow the Quran and the Sunnah.

16. There are people who would like to mislead and confuse Muslims and even destroy their faith in Islam. A lot of books on Islam are written

by Zionists and others and these people have no intention to propagate the teachings of Islam. At the same time there are a lot of Muslims whose knowledge of Islam is minimal. The consequence of allowing everyone to preach Islam could be confusion and loss of faith among those Muslims who are unable to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

17. There are also those among Muslims whose preachings of Islam are directed towards other objectives. For these people wrong interpretations are of minor consideration as long as they achieve their real objectives. The result would be to pollute the teachings of Islam with extraneous matters or even to render Muslims unIslamic.

18. The history of Islam is replete with accounts of how deviationist sects were formed and how assassinations became a weapon for a few of these sects. Today once again we see the emergence of such sects. In Malaysia itself we have seen a murderous attempt made on innocent bystanders and public servants by a group of deviationists. And of course in many villages Muslims are divided against each other to the extent that they will not pray in the same mosque, will not recognise marriages solemnised by people they dislike or say funeral prayers over the bodies of brother Muslim whom they have arbitrarily condemned as non-Muslims.

19. Religion is not mere ideology. It is a deep commitment that cannot be changed easily. Once a faith is accepted, it is most difficult to change the faith. Similarly once an interpretation of the religious belief is accepted, it is almost impossible, especially among Muslims to correct or change the interpretation. Among Muslims the followers of one sect will not readily accept the practices of other sects, even though they may accept the other sect as Islamic. Of course when they regard a sect as unIslamic they will not allow themselves to be influenced. On the other hand the followers of the sect condemned as unIslamic may consider the condemnation as wrong, and that their own interpretation. Consequently they will adhere to their wrong interpretation come what may. To them, they are the ones with the right interpretation and they will therefore cling to it with tenacity.

20. It can be seen that once a wrong interpretation is accepted, it is difficult or almost impossible to correct it. This is not so because religion is largely a matter of faith, most of which is unquestioning. It is not entirely a matter of logic or reason which can be argued with and proven wrong. And religion among those lacking in learning and knowledge both of the religion itself and of worldly matters is likely to involve greater commitment than with the knowledgeable.

21. The importance of the dakwah is obvious here. If the correct and accepted teachings of Islam are propagated then we would be fulfilling the injunctions of the Quran. But to spread the wrong interpretation of Islam cannot be interpreted as dakwah. It is indeed the antithesis of dakwah and a Muslim community would be failing in its duty if it was to stand by while someone is blatantly undermining the faith of the Muslims.

22. Islam does not elevate the absolute freedom of the individual into an article of faith as it is now being regarded in western countries. The Muslim individual is enjoined to relate himself to Allah and to the

community i.e. the community in which he lives. He may not do what is injurious to the community particularly in the pursuit of his own selfish gains. The concept of total and absolute individual freedom has no place in a Muslim community. The good Muslim must consider the interests and the good of the community in all that he does.

23. The community has a right to protect itself from the individual members of the community if such individuals propose to damage or mislead the community or some of its members.

24. Western concepts of the rights of individuals has resulted in the destruction of moral values. Thus the phenomenon of streakers who run naked in public as a demonstration of the freedom of the individual. Such is the value placed on individual rights that the public do not feel scandalised by such behaviour. Instead the newspapers report this event with glee. Similarly, again as a demonstration of the rights of individuals, the most atrocious clothings are worn, faces are painted, drugs are taken and orgies held. The community does not really do anything to prevent what was once regarded even by Western cultures as depravity. Everyone it seems should be allowed to do their own thing.

25. Islam does not subscribe to such individual freedom. There are codes of behaviour which must be adhered to in the Islamic community. Similarly in the teaching or propagation of Islam the Muslim community has a duty to ensure that individualistic and perverted teachings which are damaging to Islam are not allowed to go on unchecked.

26. Another aspect of the dakwah which merits the attention of this Muktamar is the faith and understanding of Islam among those who have only recently embraced Islam. In Malaysia we have seen many instances where large numbers of people embrace Islam but are subsequently left to their own devices. This is so because we find it extremely difficult to get Muslims willing to work and teach among these new brothers who live in remote areas under primitive conditions. Yet we find many Muslims willing to give up everything in order to involve in dakwah among those whose knowledge and practice of Islam are already considerable - or at least much more than those who have newly embraced Islam.

27. There is a new fervour among Muslims of all strata and calling. We now find doctors, engineers, sociologists, accountants who are willing to devote much time on dakwah. Indeed some of these people in their fervour have decided to give up their vocations entirely in order to participate in the dakwah - such is their commitment, however misguided.

28. Unfortunately very few of these people are willing to work among our new brothers and sisters in order to enlighten them on Islam.

29. What is needed is not the giving up of everything worldly in order to become a mendicant in the service of Allah, and thereby gain merit exclusively for oneself. As a Muslim, our sacrifice should be not only in the performance of those ibadah which are for oneself only but also those which will help bring Islamic enlightenment to our less fortunate brothers and sisters who by the grace of Allah have chosen to embrace Islam. Dakwah that concentrates on the already knowledgeable in Islam in order to achieve near perfection in the adherence to the teachings of Islam is enjoined upon. But surely those who are ignorant of most of

the tenets of Islam because they have only just embraced the religion of Allah, surely they cannot be forced to wait while we seek to ensure that our knowledge and practice of Islam is beyond reproach. Such an attitude would imply a selfishness that is quite unIslamic.

30. Islam is blessed in having so many Muslim scholars and intellectuals who are willing to travel thousands of miles to Malaysia in order to discuss the problems of Muslims and the duty of spreading the teachings of Islam among Muslims. But we also need to have Muslims who may not be great scholars or intellectuals but who are willing to spread the teachings of Islam among our new brothers in the remote areas of Malaysia. We do not require that they give up all their professions. Indeed if they are doctors and social workers, they would be very useful practising their skills among the sick and the ailing in the new Muslim communities. I leave this to our Islamic conscience.

31. The Malaysian Government is willing to help in every way to strengthen and make effective the dakwah activities. I would like to assure you that the Government is fully committed to this task. Let us not waste our time in destroying in order to built. that is not necessary at all. What is required is to build on whatever strength we have. And I can assure you that in Malaysia we have a lot that can be put in the service of the dakwah.

32. I pray to Allah s.w.t. that He will guide you in your deliberations. I pray to Allah that this conference will not be just another intellectual exercise but will indeed contribute in a tangible way towards solving the multitude of problems that face the Muslim world, particularly those concerned with dakwah.

With these prayers I now declare this Muktamar open.

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