

**Malaysia fetes World Interfaith Harmony Week**  
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Tomorrow, Malaysia will for the first time celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week as put forward by the United Nations (UN) with various programmes prepared, including a meet-and-greet session with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and religious leaders in Putrajaya.

National Unity and Integration Department director-general Azman Amin Hassan said the prime minister's participation demonstrated his commitment towards resolving religious issues in the country and preserving the well-being of Malaysia's multi-racial community.

"The Committee for the Promotion of Inter-religious Understanding and Harmony has also agreed on this celebration, which it says signifies the government's concern on religious matters.

"This is also in line with Najib's expressed hopes at the UN, in which he said he did not want any extremist or militant groups to threaten unity and security in Malaysia," he said in an exclusive interview with Bernama on the programme in Putrajaya.

World Interfaith Harmony Week, a brainchild of the King of Jordan, Abdullah II, and his personal envoy and special adviser, Prince Ghazi Muhammad, that was presented at the 65th UN General Assembly in New York last year, which was then accepted, has been slated to be an annual celebration in the first week of February in all member countries.

The celebration also hopes to increase multi-racial cooperation and harmony worldwide following misunderstanding on Islam and terrorism after the Sept 11 incident at the World Trade Centre (WTC), New York, in 2001.

Commenting on the highlights of World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrations tomorrow, Azman said the prime minister will address religious leaders and followers to preserve harmony among Malaysia's varied cultures and religions.

He is also scheduled to present letters of appointment to members of the Committee for the Promotion of Inter-religious Understanding and Harmony, he added.

Although the UN proposed for celebrations to be carried out in the first week of February, Azman said Malaysia had already started various programmes since early this year which would be held until end of this month.

Among the activities include 'muzakarah' (discussion) with muftis from each state and prominent Muslim figures organised by the Islamic Development Institute, as well as dissemination of religious harmony and muhibah (goodwill) messages at prayer houses with help from the Islamic Development Department and other religious organisations.

"We also took the opportunity to spread word about World Interfaith Harmony Week at several Chinese New Year events and invited all religious leaders to attend, emphasising that there needs to be increased cooperation among all followers in the country," he said.

**Pacifying conflicts and tension**

He added that religious leaders could help pacify conflicts and tension faced by any race or religion before they escalated into something more serious.

Citing the conflict among Muslims and Christians in Nigeria which took hundreds of innocent lives, he said the problem was resolved only after two prominent religious personalities, Imam Dr Muhammad Nurayn Ashafa (right in pic) and Pastor Dr James MoveI Wuye (left in pic), championed reconciliation.

"Both of them came to Malaysia last year with representatives from several other countries to tell their experiences which ended in friendship and joint campaigns to create interfaith understanding through peace, not war," he said.

Commenting on unity in Malaysia, Azman said the situation was good with solutions found for most of the issues raised.

Other countries celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week include Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Philippines, the United States of America and Germany.

- Bernama

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