

1Malaysia foundation welcomes interfaith committee
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Yayasan 1Malaysia says the formation of an interfaith relations working committee is a good move and it is also significant that Muslim institutions and the Consultative Council on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism are represented in it.

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, chairman of the Board of Trustees of Yayasan 1Malaysia, said although the stature and structure of the committee and its composition differed from what the Yayasan 1Malaysia had proposed earlier this year, "it is our hope that it will be able to resolve the outstanding religious controversies which have challenged the nation for a number of years now."

In the ultimate analysis, he said the committee, which would be under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Department, would not only have to provide solutions to concrete issues that impinge upon the different religious communities but also change the mindset of substantial segments of the nation's populace on how they understand and practise their respective faiths.

"This is a task that the committee will have to undertake with the support and cooperation of other groups in society that are also committed to a holistic transformation of dominant attitudes towards religion prevalent in Malaysia today," he said in a statement today.

Chandra said the committee should also study laws and policies in other Muslim majority countries which had to grapple with similar challenges in relation to their non-Muslim minorities.

"The experiences of other societies may help us understand our own situation better as we attempt to formulate solutions that are feasible in our own setting," he added.

Revisit draft report

Chandra also felt that the committee should hold discussions with groups and individuals outside the committee who had knowledge and understanding of the issues that the committee would be examining.

"In this regard, the committee may want to meet up with scholars of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS), who have done a great deal of research on vital issues pertaining to Islamic jurisprudence in the contemporary world and on inter-faith relations," he said.

Chandra also proposed that the committee revisit a draft report prepared by a committee under the Attorney-General's Chambers, comprising state Islamic bodies, representatives of various religions, and non-governmental organisations, that sat from 2005 to 2007.

That committee had deliberated upon issues such as conversion and custody of children, the rights of a spouse when one party in a marriage embraced another faith, the status of a deceased person whose religious identity was the subject of dispute, and other related matters.

Chandra said although the report did not obtain the unanimous endorsement of the entire committee, many of the solutions it proposed were balanced, rational and inclusive.

"If they can be revisited with an open mind, the new Interfaith Committee may find its task a little easier," he said.

- Bernama

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