

**Mosques: Barring non-Muslims portrays negative image**  
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The issue of non-Muslims entering mosques has received wide media coverage when Serdang member of parliament, Teo Nie Ching visited Surau al-Huda in Kajang to deliver Ramadan's aid in her constituency.

Some view non-Muslims to be 'un-clean' to enter such a place and their presence is a form of desecration of such a holy place. Subsequent to it, the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) and the Selangor Religious Islamic Council (Mais) have issued directives disallowing non-Muslims from entering mosques.

We, the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) are of the opinion that there should never be any denigration of another human being based on gender, race or creed. God has honored all human being irrespective of beliefs.

The Qur'an established this very fact in the verse 'Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam' [17:70].

Religiously speaking, Islam teaches vying each other with respect and in good causes. To each is a goal to which God turns him; then strive together towards all that is good [2:148].

Conscientious and sensible people, of course, would lean toward an approach based on cooperation and empathy than toward an approach based on needless confrontation and unwarranted hostility.

We strongly feel that disallowing non-Muslims from entering mosques only portrays a negative image of Islam and is not in line with the examples set by the Prophet. It is well-known from the tradition that the Prophet allowed Christians from Najran to pray in his mosque in Madinah.

In a multi-religious country such as Malaysia, adopting views that disallow non-Muslims from entering mosques, which are established in some school of thoughts, is inappropriate.

Nobody from other faiths should be barred from entering mosques or any place of worship for Muslims, as long as their purpose is good, they respect the sacredness of the place of worship and are modestly dressed.

They should also be allowed to deliver speeches, provided that the speech is in line with the spirit of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.

It is in the interest of maslahah or common good of Islam that non-Muslims should feel welcomed and not intimidated from visiting mosques.

Calls to ban non-Muslims from entering mosques or any knee-jerk reaction by the Islamic authorities to bow to certain political pressure in preventing the commendable attitude of cooperation and mutual respect is regrettable and uncalled for.

While Islam may have been a vanguard of freedom and progress evidenced by the magnificent civilisations throughout history, this traditional and orthodox position by the Islamic authorities remain seriously at odd with the notion of the universalism of Islam.

The sensible path forward should be guided by the true Islamic values enshrined in the Qur'an and by the spirit of brotherhood of mankind, mutual respect and empathy.

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