

Join efforts to bridge divide, Australia urged

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DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday urged Australia to help Malaysia bridge the divide between the West and the Islamic world.

The Prime Minister said the nation, which enjoys a harmonious ethnic and religious diversity like Malaysia, should speak up at the international level to improve understanding between the two entities. "We have a common background in that our social fabric is unique since we are racially and religiously diverse.

"I strongly believe that a country which can establish racial harmony and religious tolerance at the domestic level will have good credentials to promote change in the international arena," he said in his keynote address after receiving an honorary doctorate in technology from Curtin University of Technology here yesterday.

Also present at the conferral at Western Australian University was his daughter, Nori.

The award is in recognition of the Prime Minister's commitment to education and his personal attributes.

Themed "Ethnic and Religious Diversity as a Source of Strength in Nation Building", the address touched on how Malaysia and Australia were well-placed to lead by example in managing societies which were racially and religiously diverse. "The current turmoil embroiling many countries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia is extremely disturbing since it was triggered by a very unfortunate spate of insensitive acts and gestures against Islam by some Western newspapers and journals.

"We should never underestimate the power of religion as an imperative for people to act, with or without the guiding voice of reason.

"In a situation that is exacerbated by a notion of rights, unchecked by a sense of responsibility which would give it meaning, voices calling for dialogue and understanding must prevail.

"Xenophobic diatribes should have no place in a civilised world and certainly no part in the rhetoric of leaders and statesmen since it could only serve to incite and anger," he said.

He said there must be mutual respect and that reciprocity should be the ethical principle that conditions relations between the West and Islam. "The West should treat Islam the way it wants Islam to treat the West," he said.

He said the international community must recognise that it has an urgent responsibility to address the state of relations between the Christian West and the Islamic World which comprised about 32 per cent and 19 per cent of the world population respectively.



HONOURED: Abdullah being conferred an honorary doctorate of technology by Tan at the Elizabeth Jolly Lecture Hall in Perth yesterday. — Bernama picture

Blaming the international media, he said certain voices advocating moderation and rationality in the West and Islamic world were not being given prominence.

"Both in the West and the Islamic world, there are many well-wishers, bridge-builders, communicators and facilitators who genuinely wish to come closer to the other side and learn, work and live together. I would like to invite Australian leaders and the people to add their voice to this noble cause," he said.

Offering Malaysia as a venue for an annual conference to resolve issues affecting the West and the Islamic world, he also invited the Australian media to do their bit.

Taking a leaf from the Malaysian experience, Abdullah said Malaysia had successfully managed its religious and ethnic diversity and capitalised on the unique social fabric for the benefit of its citizens.

On the economy, he said the Malaysian Government had always ensured equitable distribution of the nation's wealth.

As far as politics were concerned, it had always engendered domestic stability and national unity through a process of power-sharing.

Abdullah also shared with his audience of about 400 people, comprising students, including Malaysians, and Curtin lecturers, his efforts to promote good governance based on the principles of Islam Hadhari. He reiterated that the comprehensive approach to the development of mankind, society and country based on the perspective of Islamic teachings and Islamic civilisation was not a "new religion".

"We wish to make Islam Hadhari an example

of the way Muslims should relate to their fellow men, especially those of other religions."

Earlier, Abdullah received a medallion and a certificate from Curtin Chancellor Eric Tan, who is Malaysian-born and a former student of the university. The Prime Minister also announced a Government donation of RM6 million to match the contribution by Curtin to the Research and Scholarship Fund to be created at the university's branch in Miri, Sarawak.