

Wrong view of Muslims

The Star - 31/5/2006

Various groups to blame, says PM

By SA'ODAH ELIAS
Odae@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Groups that commit terror in the name of Islam, governments that try to demonise and criminalise legitimate movements of resistance and national liberation, and the media should be held accountable for the widening rift between the Muslim world and the West.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that when groups claiming to champion the cause of Muslims and calling themselves by Muslim names committed acts of terror, it was difficult to prevent the association of Muslims and their religion with terrorism.

On the other hand, he said, there were governments that wantonly declare Muslim movements engaged in legitimate struggles against occupying forces and oppressive governments as terrorist, to stigmatise them and undermine their credibility, so as to deny them international sympathy and support.

"The global media, dominated as it is by Western perspectives and interests, often impacts more negatively on the Muslim world," he said in his keynote address at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable yesterday.

"We see only what we are permitted to see in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is often also the case in the occupied territories of Palestine.

"When Western countries make a demand upon, say, Iran or Hamas, the media often refer to the demands as coming from the international community.

"When Muslim nations voice



PRECIOUS RESOURCE: Abdullah presenting a book to Puan Sri Shamsiah Md Hashim, the wife of the late Dr Noordin, at the launch of the book at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

a position, they are never referred to as the international community, although they are greater in number."

Abdullah said that, when he, as chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and other Muslim leaders issued statements condemning the unruly demonstrations against the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, only passing mention was accorded them, but the images of the unruly acts were shown on television over and over again.

He was, however, optimistic that the rift could be healed through dialogue so that better understanding could be fostered on both sides of the divide.

Dialogue, he said, could clarify issues, especially the much misunderstood concept of *jihad*.

In the West and most of the non-Muslim world, said Abdullah, *jihad* was a bad word due to its abuse by terrorists and its distortion by both the media and analysts.

He noted that referring to terrorists and *jihadis* had become fashionable among analysts, including those who considered themselves experts on terrorism, when in truth, they could not be further apart.

Jihad, said Abdullah, carried a positive meaning of struggling to improve oneself morally, spiritually and in the material

world - though there was a lesser *jihad* whose meaning was a struggle to defend one's land, possessions and the faith.

"Defence of one's land, property and faith can extend to the use of arms if, and only if, peaceful means have been exhausted. Islamic rules of engagement in war forbid the harming of innocent people and civilians," he said.

"It is these provisions that have been misunderstood or deliberately distorted by elements on all sides. *Jihad* cannot be equated with terrorism. Indeed, *jihad* and Islamic rules of engagement are the very antithesis of terrorism."

The world, including Muslim

countries and organisations, he said, must condemn terrorist acts by any quarter, including their own, and should deny them assistance and sanctuary.

Similarly, he said, countries of the West should be more open when discussing their policies towards West Asia that were unjust and contributed to anti-Western sentiment, insurgency and terrorism in the Muslim world.

Abdullah later launched two books dedicated to the Institute of Strategic and International Studies' former chairman, the late Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee.

The four-day meeting, which started on Monday, is organised by Asean ISIS.