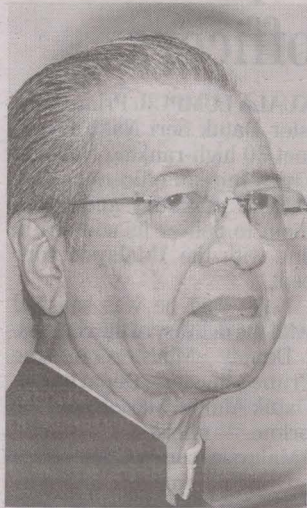


DATE: 16/12/2009

# Dr M asks NGOs to network for Muslim unity

NST-16/12/2009



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the Organisation of the Islamic Conference has its limitations in uniting Muslims

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has proposed the formation of a chain of non-governmental organisations to unite Muslims throughout the world.

The former prime minister said this should be done as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) had failed to do so.

Dr Mahathir said the OIC, being an organisation of governments, had various constraints, such as not being able to make decisions freely.

"If Muslim governments cannot bring unity and individual efforts appear too small to have any worthwhile effect, can Muslims who are con-

cerned about unity resort to civic action and form NGOs in order to achieve our goal?"

Dr Mahathir said this had to be looked at seriously as by having a chain of NGOs in Muslim countries and in countries where there are large numbers of Muslims, it may be possible to promote unity among Muslim NGOs.

"We should not be too ambitious as to set our target too high, for example the unity of Muslims nationwide.

"Unity of Muslim NGOs would be sufficient for a start," said Dr Mahathir in his speech at the opening of the 2nd International Muslim Unity convention, at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The two-day convention is organised by the Ramadhan Foundation of Britain and

Malaysia's Perdana Leadership Foundation.

Dr Mahathir said if NGOs became the vehicle for Muslim unity, then their objectives and purposes must be determined as early as possible.

"This is to avoid objectives which will not win the support of the majority of the Muslims.

"I think our first priority should be merely the promotion of Muslim brotherhood as enjoined by the Quran.

"There may be questions as to which Muslims should unite. The answer should be all who claim they are Muslim.

"We must not question to which Muslim sects they belong to, whether they are Sunnis or Shia or Wahabis or whatever, before we consider them qualified to join other Muslims in brotherhood and unity."

Dr Mahathir said one should not stress the differences between the sects but rather on the common things which they believed in or practice.

"We should not try to convert each other but we should try to get to know one another better.

There are many misunderstandings between us. We suspect each other of practising things which are incompatible with Islam.

"We should try to clarify where there are misunderstandings and remove suspicions of one another.

"However, we must not give the impression that we are trying to change the beliefs or practices of each other because if we try to do this, immediately there would be conflict rather than unity."

Dr Mahathir also said Muslim NGOs must launch a concerted campaign to stop the revenge mentality, which leads to blind retaliation.

"They must be forced to think and plan to strategise so that their sacrifices if needed would yield the desired results."

Dr Mahathir said if one failed to achieve total unity, they should be prepared to accept even partial unity.

"There is really much that can be done even with partial unity, if only we apply our minds to problems.

"Muslim unity cannot be brought about overnight.

"It would take a considerable length of time and we who initiated it may never see the unity that we crave for but this should not deter us."