

PM calls for world dialogue to counter Islamophobia

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has called on the global community to engage in dialogue to counter Islamophobia and other forms of religious hatred and discrimination worldwide.

Anwar made the call in the wake of widespread outcry and anger by Muslim nations over the permitted burning of the Quran outside of Stockholm's central mosque in Sweden during last month's Aidiladha celebration.

He said the disgraceful abuse of free speech and expression had allowed irresponsible quarters to justify hate and cruelty.

"Islamophobia is a poison that threatens Western nations as much as it threatens Muslims in whatever country they reside.

"It is a contradiction, alongside all illogical hatred and xenophobia, to the very aims of our shared human society.

"We cannot resolve these issues by burning and desecrating each other's holy books, but by reading them and engaging in dialogue," he said in a statement yesterday.

Anwar lauded the passage of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution on "countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence" in response to the Quran burning.

"Unfortunately, for every progressive step taken against Islamophobia, a fire of hatred ignites among those who hide their heinous acts behind the masks of free speech and expression, as demonstrated by the dissenting member states.

"The disgraceful use of free speech leaves it vulnerable to abuse to justify hate and cruelty rather than opposing tyranny.

"In as much as we reject the extremes of totalitarianism, an extremist notion of freedom is equally detrimental to society, which could lead to further infringements upon others rights to life and safety," he said.

He also congratulated the Swedish government for taking a firm stand against Islamophobia and looked forward to seeing the Swedish police echo this stance.

"The harm and pain caused by the acts of a few can only be balanced by the rest of us, standing together, and choosing to respect one another, to care and show compassion, and to seek out understanding," he said.