

**Muslims urged to unite**  
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**APPEAL: Two leaders call on Sunnis, Shias to end sectarian violence**

PUTRAJAYA: TWO influential Muslim leaders have jointly appealed for all Sunni and Shia Muslims to end the bloodshed and mindless killings among themselves.

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Iranian president Sayyid Muhammad Khatami made the appeal yesterday and urged Muslims to unite.

Dr Mahathir said the animosity between the Shias and the Sunnis had weakened the Muslim ummah and made Muslims vulnerable to the manipulations of outside elements and the enemies of Islam.

"All over the world we are seeing Muslims being discriminated against, whether Shias, Sunnis, or Wahabis.

"To our enemies, we are one and the same and we are branded as terrorists.

"Unfortunately, among the Muslims themselves there seems to be a deep divide based on the differences in interpretation.

"We need to show the world that we are followers of a faith that believes in peace, and it is time that we stop the killings," he said during a press conference.

He said Muslims were bound by the same beliefs and the same statement of faith in God and the Prophet.

"Therefore, the basic tenets should hold Muslims together instead of tearing them apart.

"The killings have tarnished the image and dignity of Muslims in the eyes of the world.

"This is why we make this appeal, to unite our Muslim brothers so we may live in peace," he said.

Khatami sent out his message through a video recording, and urged all Islamic thinkers to come up with measures to end the sectarian violence.

The Shia leader also urged the Organisation of Islamic Conference to set up a task force to examine the divide in depth, and submit concrete proposals for the political and religious leaders of the Muslim community to act upon.

"Innocent people have been massacred but no voices (of protest) have been heard.

"We should overcome the conflict and the violence, and promote friendship and integration instead," he said in his recording.

The appeal was the brainchild of academician Dr Chandra Muzaffar, who said it was the first time that two major figures, from two different sects, had collaborated to send out a joint call for Muslim unity.

He said the appeal had been translated into five different languages, and added that it would be followed by other programmes and an international workshop.

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