

**Islam Must Play Role To Underscore Human Solidarity In Divided World Today -
Abdullah
Bernama
4 June, 2013**

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- Islam must play its role to underscore human solidarity in today's divided world, said former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Abdullah, who is also the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) chairman, said this solidarity must be based on genuine respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the people of Asean as well as emphasising their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity.

"It is our duty to rely on inter-faith consultations when matters which seriously affect the common interest of multi-religious Asean population arise," he said in his welcoming address at the IKIM International Symposium on 'Islam and The New Era of Asean Countries: Unity of Worldview Towards A Shared Prosperity', here, Tuesday.

The two-day conference was opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The conference is to identify bases of Muslim cooperation through the worldview of Islam and to search for appropriate initiatives in the face of present-day crisis of civilisation and the socio-economy.

Abdullah said Islam could also play a very important role in the emerging issues and trends involving issues of social security, development and unity.

He said the issues were quite central to Islam as the religion of peace which rejected extremism, aggression, the threat of force and criminal violence as well as issues of climate change, food security and water crisis that affected many muslim countries.

"In history, Islam had always preferred reliance on engagement and peaceful settlements of disputes.

"Diplomatic protests, reasoned responses, commitments to treaty agreements, and fair arbitration are among the real, alternative solutions to the variety of conflicts while the use of force is only justified by religion under severely restricted conditions."

He said Malaysia could be studied as a model or mini Asean where its population consisted of many ethnic and religious groups - 60 per cent of the population practised Islam while the others were followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism and other religions.

"Despite that, since independence Malaysia has had one of the best economic records in Asia with GDP growing at an average 6.5 per cent, with the economic expanding in the new innovative sectors of science and commerce," he said.

Abdullah said since the fight for independence, Malaysia safeguarded the interest of all including the minority, freedom of religion was protected and the government system was in accordance with democracy, rule of law and good governance.

Describing the most precious asset of Asean as its people, he said the development of

quality human capital must be a priority, including upgrading of the intellectual capacity of Asean people in order to be a knowledge-based economy and a developed region.

"The approach must emphasise increasing the mastery of knowledge and creativity, strengthening scientific and innovative capabilities and nurturing a cultured society that possesses strong moral values of trustworthiness and integrity," he said.

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