

## **Giving aid more Islamic than fighting in Syria, minister says**

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 2 — Providing humanitarian aid to victims of the raging civil war in Syria is much more Islamic than picking up arms and joining the rebels, Islamic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom said today in his criticism of the involvement of Malaysians in the ongoing conflict.

The minister in the Prime Minister Department also said that Malaysians partaking in the civil war that has killed more than 3,000 people in Syria are confused about the notion of jihad (Islamic struggle), pointing out that the religion does not condone the murder of fellow Muslims.

“Many former mujaheedin fighters in Syria have said that they do not need Malaysians to help them fight... instead, they said they want us to provide humanitarian aid like food, clothing and others,” he told reporters here.

“They need to understand what Jihad really means: is fighting among Muslims in a war that is not necessary can be deduced as jihad?” He added.

Jamil also said that Malaysians intending to join the Syrian civil war should first consult those with deep knowledge of Islam to understand what jihad really means.

Last week, the Foreign Affairs Ministry said 15 Malaysians might have been killed in Syria after joining in terrorist and jihadist activities with Islamist militant group Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (IS).

It said the news was conveyed by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations in New York at a press conference on June 18.

IS, also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), is a splinter group of al-Qaeda that wants to set up an Islamic caliphate encompassing both Iraq and Syria.

IS is viewed as a terror organisation by authorities both here and abroad.

The news drew criticism from various quarters including former Perlis mufti Datuk Dr Asri Zainul Abidin and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The latter also urged religious scholars to state their views on Muslim suicide and the ongoing jihadist movement, noting that no edict has been issued on the matter as yet.

Agreeing with Dr Mahathir, Asri said that bearing arms and taking part in any conflict should be a “last resort” when all other forms of reconciliation have failed.

Reuters had earlier reported that Islamic extremism is fuelling increasing public concern in nations with substantial Muslim populations from Malaysia and Nigeria to Lebanon, according to an international poll.

The report suggested that the civil war in Syria has galvanized such worries throughout the Middle East, led by neighbouring Lebanon, where 92 per cent of the population expressed concern over extremism, up from 81 per cent last year.

The share of those somewhat or very concerned rose in Tunisia to 80 per cent from 71 per cent in 2013, in Egypt to 75 per cent from 69 per cent, in Jordan to 62 per cent from 54 per cent and in Turkey to 50 per cent from 37 per cent.

In Asia, the poll found 66 per cent in Bangladesh and 56 per cent in Indonesia have negative opinions of al-Qaeda while roughly four-in-ten in Pakistan and 32 per cent in Malaysia also see the group unfavourably, but many in these countries offer no opinion.

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