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PM: Take middle path to justice, peace for all

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KUALA LUMPUR: Religious extremism throughout the world can be fought by combating ignorance and the perversion of faith, the prime minister said.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said this could be achieved by a four-pronged approach: giving religious education a universal outlook, encouraging the public interaction of religious academics, media promotion and inculcating religious values in the governance of public institutions.

In his speech at the opening of the international conference on "Religion in the Quest for Global Justice and Peace" here yesterday, Abdullah said: "In reflecting on the extremist tendencies in the sphere of faith and religion, we discover that extremists often have a shallow understanding of their faith.

"They take verses out of context

and create a distorted perspective of religion which becomes a convenient tool for the pursuit of power and selfish interest."

Abdullah said the phenomenon of religious extremism compelled everyone, especially scholars and intellectuals, to play a part in battling it.

"Firstly, we should study the religious curricula in our schools and universities. Our religious education should convince us that the dignity and integrity of all human beings are worthy of our respect.

"Religion should inculcate a truly universal and inclusive outlook, not a mentality that is narrow, exclusive and parochial."

Abdullah said religious scholars and intellectuals should be encouraged to engage with the wider public, and not just concentrate on producing academic work for specialised audiences.

"They should be prepared to educate the public on the great issues that face us all and broaden public understanding of religion

and its role in promoting justice and peace."

Abdullah said the media should also deepen and broaden its understanding of religion in order to advance the universal values of justice, peace and compassion which lie at the heart of the world's great religious philosophies.

"Lastly, we must be prepared to implement positive religious values in the governance of our institutions, from the government down to the basic family unit.

"We must combat the prevailing public mood, which is sometimes prejudiced against religion and often views it as fundamentally divisive."

Abdullah added: "This is why I have put forward the approach of Islam Hadhari, based on 10 fundamental principles derived from the universal principles found within the Muslim tradition.

"I believe that in governing our institutions, based on the positive values of Islam Hadhari, we can

dispel the negative prejudices against religion and foster greater justice and peace."

Abdullah said he was convinced that religion could provide solutions to global poverty and disparities, to oppression and dispossession, and other injustices that cause pain and suffering to millions.

"The right path universal to all religions lies in dedicating our efforts towards eradicating inequalities of all kinds. Indeed, the yawning gap between the very rich and the very poor is unconscionable from the standpoint of every religion.

"This is why I have argued for a new approach for development in Malaysia; one that ensures equitable distribution of quality opportunities for all Malaysians.

"It is an approach which is consistent with the concept of the 'middle path' or life of moderation as espoused in all major religions — ensuring that the fruits of development are shared by all."