

THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC SYMPOSIUM

THE ISLAMIC CENTRE (PUSAT ISLAM), KUALA LUMPUR, 5 MAC 1986

Alhamdulillahil alamin wasalatu wasalamu ala sayidina Muhammadin wa ala alihi wasahbihi ajmain. Segala pujian bagi Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala dan salam sejahtera ke atas junjungan kita Nabi Muhammad S.A.W. Dengan izin Allah kita dapat bersama-sama pada hari ini untuk mengadakan Simposium Islam Antarabangsa.

2. Saya berharap Nadwah Islam ini akan memberi manfaat kepada kita semua, bukan sahaja manfaat kepada para peserta Nadwah ini, tetapi juga umat Islam seluruhnya. Saya yakin Nadwah ini akan meningkatkan kesungguhan kita untuk mengembangkan syiar Islam.

3. Saya difahamkan persidangan ini dihadiri oleh ramai tetamu daripada badan-badan antarabangsa seperti Riseap, Rabitah dan Majlis Masjid Antarabangsa. Dengan ini saya meminta izin untuk berucap dalam Bahasa Inggeris.
Distinguished Guests,

My Brothers and Sisters,

4. The Muslims are today the focus of unprecedented attention. Although they live in different climates, practicing different customs and political systems, as majorities and minorities, speaking different languages, the Muslims all over the world retain an abiding sense of Islamic affinity an affinity which is the hallmark of the Muslim Ummah or the community of Muslim peoples. It was fourteen centuries ago that Prophet Muhammad Sallallah Alaihi Wassallam left Makkah for Madinah where he established the first Islamic state based on the concepts revealed in the Qu'ran. For the first time in history, those not following the same religious and cultural system as the rulers were given complete freedom to maintain their different identities, and to enforce their own religious laws. Muslims have never forced their faith on others and it is wrong the refore for anyone to fear Islam. The success of the Islamic system was not only in its ability to accommodate people of differing religions and cultures, but also in the material, intellectual, cultural and scientific fields. Islam gave birth to a civilisation which continues to be a source of inspiration to mankind to this day, albeit unconsciously for most people.

5. Within fifty years of its revelation Islam established creative links with the then major cultures of Persia, Egypt and Greece, leading to an unprecedented flowering of human genius. The great epoch of creative activity which followed and manifested itself in remarkable advances in the arts and sciences laid the foundations of modern knowledge and learning. It was indeed the Muslim scholars who were instrumental in generating the intellectual developments which prepared the ground for the European Renaissance. It is well to remember that during the golden age of Islam Europe was passing through the dark ages when knowledge and learning were regarded as the work of the Devil and those

pursuing them were persecuted and burnt at the stakes.

6. The resurgence of Islam, and its dynamic and revolutionary principles during this 15th century of the Islamic era, created widespread interest, particularly in the West. The educated, intelligent and inquiring minds of the modern world should know and understand the reasons for the resilience and tenacity of this great religion. Unfortunately a majority of publications produced in the non-Muslim world, particularly the West, tend to present a highly distorted and often totally false image of Islam and its teachings.

7. Emerging from the clutches of western imperialism the fifties and sixties saw a mad scramble by the Muslim countries to emulate everything western. They appeared to blame Islam for all their failures and miseries. They saw in modernisation and material progress an answer to all their ills. Admiring the separation of church and state they tried to impose the same system in their own community. Western concepts of the secular and the religious and of antagonistic ideologies were readily accepted and attempts made to impose the same separation in Muslim communities.

8. In politics, western ideologies helped to confuse the Muslims further. Islam the religion was compared with various western political ideologies and attempts were made to explain Islam on the basis of these ideologies. Thus some insist that Islam is socialism, indeed the original socialism. Others point out that in Islam it is accepted that some people may be raised above the others and rampant capitalism is therefore compatible with Islam. There is always a little truth in both allegations but the occasional similarities do not mean the assumptions of identity are true. The truth is that Islam is unique as an all-encompassing religion, a way of life dedicated to goodness and to Allah the compassionate and the Merciful.

9. Fortunately realisation has come to a growing number of Muslims that Islam is not socialism, or capitalism or communism. Islam is the religion of Allah and not an ideology thought up by men. While there may be similarities, these are incidental and are not of a fundamental character. With this realisation Islam has regained its stature and Muslims their identity. The stage is now set for a Muslim resurgence that will contribute not only to the betterment of Muslims but also to a world that is racked by systems and ideologies which confuse. Islam is not oppressive. It is not a religion of the 7th. Century A.D. It is the religion for all times, able to create a more meaningful life, a society that is more equitable and peaceful.

10. If Islam does not appear to be so it is because Muslim themselves are frequently confused and interpret Islam for their own purpose. And so we have the "conservatives" and the "modernists", each at loggerhead with the other. Their differences encompass all human activities: legal, political, economic, social and personal. These differences must be faced but they can only be faced in a conducive atmosphere.

11. Free discussion of religious issues must be permitted but this freedom must

never be abused. Fanatical extremism of any kind must be rejected. The answer to the differences between the "conservatives" and the "modernists" lies somewhere in between and it must be found. Those who preach fire and brimstone at every turn are a menace and must be treated as such. Extreme fanaticism in one direction inevitably and swiftly breeds extreme fanaticism in the other direction; and when two parties to a dispute degenerate into unreasoning fanatics, it is merely a matter of time before verbal thunder changes to physical violence. We ought to know by now that violence never changed a man's beliefs, never resolved a difference of opinion. We ought to know that in fact it hardens opinions and adds bitterness to the manner in which they were uncompromisingly held. This is why Muslim law and Islamic principles instruct the Muslims to avoid confrontation but to settle differences through discussion and compromise.

12. It needs to be emphasised again and again that Islam is always careful to follow the middle path, even in worship. Whenever Muhammad S.A.W. had to choose between two alternatives, both equally permissible, he always chose the easier or more moderate one. Regardless of its logic or topic, extremism is always abhorred. It is not a normal pattern of behaviour and inevitably leads to numerous complications and deviations.

13. Another consideration is the need for logical reasoning. It is true that man's intuitive basic beliefs are not changed or arrived at by reason, but between those who accept the same postulates, understanding can only be achieved if the human mind can logically appreciate the reasons for the belief. Even those who are said to believe unquestioningly, actually believe because that is the basis of thinking in his group or society. The other believe because of a gut feeling of fear, particularly of things they are unable to understand.

14. God has given us the faculty to think and over and over again in the Quran He has exhorted us to think, that is to use our faculty to reason. Even when we refer to the Quran and the Hadith for guidance reason has to be used. If sometimes we differ in our interpretations it does not follow that one is right and the other is wrong. It may well be that both are right or both are wrong. The important thing is that we study, we analyse and we interpret with sincerity, without prejudice or self-interest.

15. The existence of two impartial and sincere opinions upon a vital issue should be taken as evidence that the truth in the matter lies somewhere in between. Islam believes in respecting the other's right to differ and respecting what he holds dear. Muslims may reject only when the fundamentals are clearly wrong.

16. In a Muslim community where religion and life cannot be separated, the deepest feelings are naturally the most frequently discussed. Muslims must display the spirit of tolerance that Islam teaches by coming together to discuss different religious and other convictions without getting excited or becoming belligerent. In such conditions the controversies can be met and resolved by Muslim intellectuals. Extremists and extremism must be isolated and shunned; and men of goodwill on both sides, "conservatives" and "modernists" must come

together to enjoin charity and reconciliation. Once this reconciliation between "conservatives" and "modernists" has been achieved, intellectual anarchy will cease and a healthy Islamic society will emerge, firm in its ideals and sure of its course of action. And thus will the Ummah's spiritual and temporal mission in this age be fulfilled.

17. But the division among Muslims is not just between the Conservatives and the Modernist. An attempt is being made to divide them further into the secularists and the spiritual groups. This is a reflection of the thinking of Orientalists who could not understand that Islam is not just a belief but a way of life. Every aspect of life is a part of religion. But because the religion of the orientalists separates the rituals of their faith from the mundane activities of daily life, they postulate the same for Muslims. And so a lot of Muslims unconsciously imbibing the thinking of the orientalists not only seek to identify secularists from the religious groups, but actually preach division and conflict between them. Thus the unity of the Ummah against which the orientalist had worked so hard is now being perpetuated by Muslims themselves. That they, the orientalists have succeeded, can be seen from the disunity and disarray of the Muslims everywhere. The saddest part is that when Muslims differ they frequently seek the help of non-Muslims in order to destroy their own co-religionists and brothers.

My brothers and Sisters,

18. We Muslims have just missed a golden opportunity to regain our greatness and spread the faith. Since the early seventies we gained great wealth from the bounty of Allah from the vast reservoirs of oil that are found in the Muslim countries.

19. Surely Allah had granted us this wealth for the good of Islam and the Muslims. With this wealth we could strengthen the position of the Muslims generally, we could free them from oppression, we could spread the faith and intensify the teachings of Islam among the faithful. With the promotion of true Islamic values we could weld the Ummah into a solid force for good in a world that has become confused by the failures of political ideologies and economic systems.

20. But the truth is that we did none of these with the wealth that Allah has given us. Every Islamic country squandered its wealth on lavish development, on the purchase of arms and on the support of one Muslim nation or group against another Muslim nation or people. Much of the wealth is invested in countries which have no friendly intention towards the Muslims or to Islam. The money invested eventually find their way to strengthen anti-Islamic forces including the Zionists. It is no secret that vast sums of Muslim wealth are handled and managed by Jewish bankers and managers.

21. In the meantime no effort is made to learn how to strengthen ourselves through knowledge and skills against our enemies although it is enjoined upon us by Allah to do so. The injunction of the Prophet to seek knowledge is ignored. Instead the easier approach of merely purchasing our needs was universally

adopted. When a Muslim country tries to acquire technical know-how and to be self-sufficient in the needs vital to Muslims, petty squabbles soon lead to other Muslims undermining these efforts.

22. Where once Muslims led in the field of human knowledge, now Muslims are the most backward people in all the arts and the sciences. Money for the pursuit of knowledge is a mere pittance compared to the vast sums spent on magnificent edifices. More time and studies and debates are devoted to the subject of covering the head of a woman than to the development of a capacity to defend Islam and the Muslims from their enemies. As a result many Muslims are lost to Islam. Many espouse Marxism or even atheism in their frustration. Many more have to submit to the rule of people who are bent on separating the Muslim from their faith.

23. Improvement in communication have brought Muslims closer together. They are in a better position to cooperate with each other and to unite. But instead they waste their time on semantics and polemics, seeking differences rather than similarities whenever they meet. Not content with separating conservatives from modernists they go on to separate and isolate so-called secularists from the spiritualists, the allegedly true Muslims. And of course the differences between the different mazhabs are more greatly magnified now. Predictably they became more divided and are easy prey for those whose business it is to divide and destroy Islam.

24. There is no doubt that we have missed the golden opportunity. While we squander our wealth and quarrel over irrelevances, others applied their mind, the wealth that was entrusted to them, and the opportunity we afforded them to destroy both our wealth and our unity. Today the wealth is no longer there. We are now back to where we were, an impoverished and divided Ummah quite incapable of challenging our foes or stopping them from gradually subjugating us.

25. There is no doubt that we have sinned against Allah. We have not been truly grateful for His gift and the opportunity that He has afforded us. We quote with great fervour that those who are not grateful for the 'nikmat' that Allah bestows shall receive no more and shall suffer in the Hereafter. But we ignore that injunction of the Quran except when we want to display our learning.

26. We must atone now for our sins. We must stop the drive towards fragmenting the Ummah. We must stop the semantics and the polemics. A religion without adherents is no religion. Already millions of Muslims have been lost. Some die of starvation even as other Muslims waste food. Some are killed in fratricidal wars. Some forsake Islam because Muslims forsake them in their hour of need. Some have lost their land to the enemies of Islam. For these people Islam no longer exists. For many it is the faith of a people who have disappeared from this earth.

27. If we are truly dedicated to Islam we must protect the faith and the Ummah. To do this we must be united. We must apply all our remaining resources to this

task. We must stop playing God and try to judge the Muslimness or otherwise of fellow Muslims. We must give equal emphasis to all the teachings of Islam.

28. Let us be honest with ourselves. Time may be running out on us as it has run out for a lot of Muslims. We cannot afford internal squabbles. We must face realities. We must acknowledge our mistakes and the wrong we did. We must correct them. We must sincerely try to regain the essence of Islam that so inspired the early Muslims so that not only did they manage to spread the teachings far and wide but they brought greatness to Islam in all fields of human endeavour.

29. We are Muslims today because of them. Let it not be said that Islam is lost to future generations because of us. Brothers and Sisters,

30. It is now my pleasure to officially declare open this International Islamic Symposium with the words ' Bismillahirrahmannirahim' .