

**THE 10TH SESSION OF THE COORDINATION COMMITTEE OF JOINT
ISLAMIC ACTION IN THE FIELD OF DA'WAH**

PAN PACIFIC HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR, 12 JANUARY 1996

I wish to express my gratitude to Almighty God, Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala for His favour in making this gathering possible; for bringing us together to exchange views on Islam and the international Islamic da'wah. Malaysia, as host of this 10th Session of the OIC Coordination Committee for Joint Islamic Action in the Field of Da'wah, is honoured by your presence and bids you all a very warm welcome.

2. That you have come from various countries to attend the Conference is testimony to your keen interest and determination to bring about coordination and cooperation in the field of da'wah, a task that is enjoined upon us by our glorious religion, Islam.

3. It is obvious from the history of Islam that Islamic da'wah was intended to spread the teachings of Islam among the non-believers and to win more adherents to the faith. Today when we talk of da'wah we seem to confine it to spreading the teaching of the faith among fellow Muslims, those who are already believers. It would seem that da'wah is now meant mainly to instruct Muslims in their faith with no attention at all regarding its spread among the non-Muslims. Indeed at times we seem not to care if in the process of instructing Muslims, we inadvertently create an image of Islam that is repugnant to the non-Muslims. We do this by being unnecessarily antagonistic towards others and by adopting a holier-than-thou attitude.

4. Perhaps we should not be concerned about what non-Muslims think of us as long as we believe we are creating good Muslims of the Muslims. If we are not concerned then of course we are rejecting the injunctions of our religion to spread the faith, i.e. to propagate it among non-Muslims. Imagine how many Muslims there would have been at the time of the Prophet, Peace be upon him, and now had the Prophet not cared for those who were not yet Muslims.

5. The Malays converted to Islam some 800 years ago. They converted because the Arab and Indian Muslim traders who came to our shores took pains to explain Islam to our ancestors and were rewarded by the voluntary mass conversion of the Malays to Islam. Had the Arab and Indian Muslim traders been solely concerned with performing only the fardhu ain and be concerned only about how Islamic they were and cared little for the impact they had on the non-Muslim Malays, the Malays of today would not be Muslim. We are grateful even if others may not be concerned whether we are Muslims or not.

6. Indeed, if we go back further we must admit that the Prophet, Peace be upon Him, never adopted an uncaring attitude towards firstly, the doubting members of his family and secondly, the idol worshippers of the Arabian peninsular. He was concerned to explain Islam to them and to win their adherence to the faith. And because he did this, Islam spread among his family, his friends and companions, the people of Madinah, and finally all the peoples in the Arabian Peninsular and beyond. If we are gathered here today, it is because Muslims in the past cared enough for non-Muslims even as they seek to understand and strengthen their own faith in the religion they were born to or they had accepted.

7. Knowing this it would be wrong for us to disregard the impact on non-Muslims when we carry out da'wah among us. We may not be able to convert them but surely it is better that they should understand our religion than they should harbour suspicion and fear from lack of knowledge and understanding of the truth about our faith.

8. Among the first persons to accept Islam was Bilal the black slave. It was the kindness of the Prophet and Muslim towards a slave which convinced him to accept the faith. Those were the early days when the teachings of Islam were not fully revealed yet. Such was the faith of Bilal despite his incomplete knowledge of the teachings that he was prepared to endure pain and punishment for his faith. Such was his role in the early days of Islam that we honour him to this day by designating one of the principal mosque officials as the Bilal.

9. The quality and the completeness of the knowledge of Islam is important to the Ummah, but the behaviour of the Ummah is equally important in da'wah. Bilal's acceptance of Islam was influenced by the way the Prophet treated him as much as by the faith of the Prophet. Clearly we cannot be effective in da'wah if our behaviour is at variance with the profession of our faith and the goodness of its teachings.

10. We say that we are enjoined to do what is right and to reject what is wrong. This clearly implies that it is not just knowledge of the religion that is required of us, but we should also be seen to do what is right and reject what is wrong. Surely what we do is not for us alone, for our place in the Hereafter. That would be very selfish and selfishness is not a quality that Islam promotes. We have an obligation to the Ummah at least, if not to those outside our faith. But if we always do what is right and avoid what is wrong, surely the non-believers too will respect our faith and ourselves. Is it wrong to have Islam and the Muslims respected even by non-Muslim?

11. And yet many of us, while carrying out our duties in spreading the teaching among ourselves, care very little whether Islam and the Muslims are respected by the non-believers. Many of us are merely concerned with spreading what we interpret as the true teachings. More than that, we seem to regard fellow Muslims as being not Muslim enough. We are seldom gentle in our words of advice. We seem to demand that Muslims do nothing else except the performance of the obligatory rituals to which we often add the optionals and even those which we concoct ourselves, believing that they are good and they are the pious things to do. And if other Muslims don't do these then we criticise them for not being good enough Muslims. We imply that they are wanting in piety. In extreme cases we reject them merely because they don't belong to a particular political party.

12. We forget that the Quran has stated that we may not criticise others as being less Muslim for it is possible that we are less Muslim than they are.

13. We forget that Allah has decreed in the Verse of an- Nahl, line 125, meaning: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy lord with wisdom And beautiful preaching; And argue with them In ways that are best And most gracious; for thy Lord knoweth best, Who have strayed from His Path, And who receive guidance."

14. We should win Muslims and non-Muslims alike as much by example as by precept. Today the Muslim Ummah cannot by any means be regarded as examples for others to respect, much less to follow. We may declare that the Quran says in Verse 110, Ali Imran that "We are the best of Peoples" but can we honestly say that by example we are the best people?

15. Today the Muslim world is in turmoil. We are fighting each other and we cannot agree even to cooperate to help ourselves. And we are weak, unable to defend ourselves, and are frequently forced to side with those whose good intentions we doubt but whose support we need because we are weak.

16. The Muslims are poor and are lacking in essential knowledge to master the skills of a modern world. We sometimes console ourselves by saying that this world is not for us, that our kingdom is in the Hereafter. And yet we know that this is not consonant with being the best people.

17. We know that poverty destroys faith but we do nothing about it, preferring to associate poverty with piety despite the teachings of the Quran that poverty is one step away from loss of faith.

18. It may be that when we are spreading the word i.e. carrying out da'wah, all we need is to explain the Quran and the valid hadiths. It may be, but it is doubtful if the faithful have nothing good to show as evidence of Allah's favour for the pious Muslims. If the learned among us are so poor that we cannot convince anyone that we are the best people; if the Muslim countries are so weak that we are completely dependent upon the charity and help of the non-Muslim powers; if it is obvious that we are willing to sell Islamic brotherhood in order to survive; if Islamic brotherhood becomes obviously a farce as we fight each other; can we really convince ourselves that we are following the correct teachings of Islam? Can we really convince others that Islam is the right path?

19. Words can be convincing but in the face of contrary actions and obvious failures, can we expect we ourselves and others to be convinced? Today Muslims are being slaughtered by others who occupy their lands. They suffer untold hardships and humiliation. Their women are raped, their men tortured and killed. And they come to us for help. Is it evidence of the goodness of Islam when we can offer them no help? Is it Islam which is wrong or is it our interpretation of Islam? Is it enough for us to make Muslims who are already safe more pious or is it also our duty to defend and protect our brothers? Don't we know that while we are busy trying to make ourselves more Islamic, many Muslims in conquered territories and those who have been forced to seek refuge in non-Muslim land have lost faith, have forsaken their religion and have even converted to other faiths? Or is it that we know, but we don't care as long as we can ensure heaven for us in the Hereafter. Are we really sure that there will be a place for us in heaven when we neglect other unfortunate brothers? Is selfishness promoted by Islam that we think we can ignore the needs of our brothers because we are busy trying to gain merit for ourselves.

20. You are here to discuss Islam and Da'wah. Be true to your faith and be honest to yourself. If we think we have not sinned, then forget the realities and concentrate on ourselves. But I feel that some of us, at least, are not interested in being holier-than-thou but regard da'wah as our duty to our brothers and to humanity as a whole.

21. On that note and in the hope that we can see ourselves as we really are, in the name of Allah the Merciful and the Compassionate, I officially open this 10th Session of the Conference of the OIC Coordination Committee of Joint Islamic Action in the field of Da'wah. Wabillahitaufig walhidayah wassalamualaikum rahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

