

MAJLIS ULANGTAHUN KE-50 MAJLIS GEREJA-GEREJA MALAYSIA
PUSAT DAGANGAN DUNIA PUTRA, KUALA LUMPUR, 25 APRIL 1997

Terlebih dahulu saya ucapkan terima kasih kepada Majlis Gereja Malaysia kerana menjemput saya hadir di Majlis perayaan Jubli Emasnya malam ini. Sempena perayaan menyambut Jubli emasnya saya ucapkan tahniah kepada Majlis Gereja-Gereja Malaysia.

2. That the Council is able to celebrate this golden Jubilee is proof of its ability to work together in the spirit of cooperation among Christians of different missions and denominations.

3. I hope the council will continue with this spirit of cooperation and extend it to all Malaysians of other religious groups so that we can together build a more united, mature, strong, tolerant and vibrant Malaysian society. I am making this call because this is an important prerequisite for building a united Malaysian society.

4. We are very fortunate that this multi-racial and multi-religious society of ours has had a long experience and tradition of living in harmony with each other. As a direct result we have achieved tremendous economic progress that have considerably lifted the quality of life of our people. This cooperation regardless of race and religion will further reinforce our capacity to build a more liberal and tolerant society.

5. However, we cannot afford to be complacent with our achievements. We have to improve this cooperation and understanding as we move forward towards a more modern economic society. If we simply maintain what we have achieved, we may find that the challenges ahead will be too difficult for us to face, as there are forces within and without which will try to derail us.

6. It is a fact that Malaysia is predominantly a Muslim country. Our official religion is Islam as enshrined in our Constitution. But the Islamic tenets command us to be tolerant towards other religious groups. The Quran says clearly "To you your faith and to us (Muslim) our faith".

7. Islam teaches us to allow complete freedom of worship to other religious groups who are willing to live in a Muslim country. Islam teaches us that all humans are created from the same parents, Adam and Eve, and as such the Quran says, "O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware". (Q.49:13) There is clearly no difference between men as far as their beginning and their status in the sight of God.

8. Islam also teaches us that there is no compulsion in matters of faith. Every one is free to make his own choice. Of course every one is completely responsible for his own deeds in the end. The Quran says, "There shall be no

coercion in matters of faith. Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trust worthy handhold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things. (Q.2:256).

9. Based on the above, freedom of worship is part and parcel of the Islamic teachings. Secondly, the difference between man is in his religious beliefs and not in race, colour or ethnicity. As such, the same respect should be accorded to all men as human beings, despite their religious differences. The Prophet Muhammad was reported to have stood in respect for a Jewish funeral which was passing in front of him. When his companions asked why he did so, he replied, "He is as human as we are". In another incident, a Jew used to place all the dirty things he could find on a street where the Prophet used to pass. The Prophet had to be careful, to avoid the dirt and filth, when he passed that street. One day, when the Prophet passed the street, he found the Jew was not anywhere to be seen. He asked of him and was told that he was sick and remained in his house. The Prophet immediately paid him a visit which shocked the Jew, who asked why the Prophet did that after all that he had done. The Prophet replied, "You are as human as I am".

10. It is obviously based on such teachings that we in Malaysia practise tolerance and mutual respect for one another. Our non-Muslim friends, such as the Buddhists and Hindus enjoy the freedom to live according to their cultural values and religious norms in a way that is not possible in many other countries. Violence as a means of solving inter-religious disputes is abhorred by all religious communities and political parties in this democratic nation. The relationship between Islam and Buddhism in a predominantly Muslim State of Kelantan, for example, has been most peaceful with the Buddhist community proudly preserving one of the biggest sleeping Buddha statues in Southeast Asia, a fact not known even by many Malaysians. And the present Muslim Menteri Besar attends ceremonies in a Buddhist Wat.

11. Malaysia is currently marred with numerous social ills of almost every conceivable type. The government is trying its best to contain these ills because we know that such ills can spread wildly and erode all our achievements. We therefore cannot afford to allow it to spread, weakening our social fabric, and eroding our strength. One of the factors that could nurture the development of a united, strong and morally upright society is the role of religion. We also know that all religions teach their adherents to be good. Any religion that teaches its followers to be bad will be doomed. We have seen the mass destruction of human lives among various religious cults from time to time. These cults are not followers of religions but are really due to the loss of direction in a materialistic world which has no time for religion. Unable to understand their existence in this world and the confusion around them, they invent their own beliefs and commit crimes including mass suicide.

12. Christian ethics and morality therefore are not different from Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist or other religious ethics and morality. This is evident by the adoption of a "Declaration toward a Global Ethic" by the Parliament of the World's Religions in their latest centenary meeting in Chicago in 1993. We know that the

Parliament of World Religions represent all religions that are being practised throughout the world. Faiths may differ but ethics and morality can be similar or even identical.

13. Looking beyond our relatively peaceful history, it would appear that the prospect of a universal set of ethics binding races, cultures, religions and traditions, is encouraging and possible. Malaysians should therefore work towards it by example and by precept.

14. I wish therefore to appeal to all leaders and elders of all religions in this country to instil positive ethics and morality among their followers, to ensure that each and every member of our society will consciously uphold our traditions, our beliefs, our morals and seek to live with the highest level of integrity so that our society can be a model of attainable harmony between people divided by differences of religion. This will indeed be a great contribution from you to our own Malaysian society.

15. Sekali lagi saya ucapkan terima kasih kepada Majlis Gereja-Gereja Malaysia kerana menjemput saya ke Majlis Perayaan Jubli Emasnya. Adalah diharapkan majlis ini bukan sahaja akan berusaha untuk mengukuhkan perpaduan di kalangan penganut-penganut Kristian tetapi juga akan berusaha untuk menjalin hubungan yang lebih baik di kalangan kaum-kaum yang menganuti berbagai-bagai agama. Sebarang usaha ke arah meningkatkan perpaduan dan kerjasama yang lebih erat antara rakyat berbagai-bagai kaum dan agama sudah tentu akan membantu negara mencapai kejayaan yang lebih cemerlang.