

## **At The Launch Of The International Haji Conference**

Palace Of The Golden Horses, Kuala Lumpur 30 September 2000

On behalf of the government and the people of Malaysia, I wish all delegates "Selamat Datang" or "Welcome" to the International Conference on Haj Guidance, the first to be held in Malaysia. I hope it will be a fruitful and successful discussion to all of you. It is a great honour for me to be given this opportunity to address you and to open this inaugural conference.

2. The Haj Pilgrimage is an event that has no parallel in the world. More than two million Muslims from every corner of the world, from all walks of life, often travelling great distances and enduring great hardship would come and gather in the holy cities of Mekah and Madinah and the fields of Arafah to perform the rituals and recite the prayers, submitting to Allah as reaffirmation of their faith in Islam, their religion.

3. But the Haj is more than just a religious ritual. It is a gathering of the `ummah' where there is a sense of oneness, a sense of being brothers as enjoined by Islam. For those who come from many lands, the gathering is a gathering of brothers of the same faith. The feeling of kinship was real.

4. This is the significance and the true achievement of the Haj other than the performance of the fifth pillar of the faith as enjoined by Islam. The performance of the rituals and the utterances of the prayers are for oneself, for each of the faithful. They gain merit by their performance for themselves. But the brotherhood of the pilgrims, the message that that implies is for all Muslims, for the Muslim `ummah' who over the years and centuries have become divided into so many sects and nations which quite often are at odds with each other, even at war with each other. They seemingly feel no longer as brothers. They seem to have rejected a cardinal principle of Islam, that they are really one people, one ummah.

5. Of course the avoidance of conflict and fighting is a part of the Haj for fighting is forbidden during the holy month and in the holy places. Even before the coming of Islam this was so. But Islam goes further. Fighting and killing by Muslims of other Muslims is forbidden anywhere, at any time.

6. But quite clearly Muslims are ignoring the injunction blatantly. Muslims are fighting and killing Muslims everywhere. Sometimes they condemned their Muslim enemies as being `kafir', non-Muslims, apostates in order to justify their killing of fellow Muslims. Sometimes they just did not bother to do even this. They just regard their enemies as enemies inspite of their being fellow Muslims. In a way we can say that many Muslims have reverted to the pre- Islamic days of ignorance, the age of the Jahiliah, when Arab tribes hold their tribe as the sole object of their loyalty. They would side with their tribe even if what their tribe did was wrong. Today it is their nation or even their political parties that they fanatically uphold and fight for and kill other Muslims. In their eyes their nation and their political parties and groups can do no wrong even when they ignore the

clear injunctions of Islam.

7. And so despite the Haj, despite the injunction against fighting and killing other Muslims, the Muslims are bitterly divided against each other. They fight each other without compunction. They even side with non-Muslims in order to ensure their Muslim enemies are defeated, subjugated and oppressed. They care not for Muslim brotherhood. Indeed when they invoke the brotherhood of Islam, it is only to justify their assault against other Muslims. The sufferings of other Muslims mean nothing to them. If fellow Muslims are oppressed and massacred even they will not help because they are too preoccupied with their own quarrels, their fights among themselves.

8. Yet the al-Quran and the Hadis tells us about how the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. banished the narrow and fanatical loyalties of the Arab tribes, in particular the Meccan refugees and the people of Madinah through the unifying teachings of Islam and set up the first Muslim state of many tribes. And the united Muslims then defeated their `Khuraish' enemies until eventually the whole Arabian Peninsular and more were united for the first time. We know from history that the Muslims then went on not just to conquer most of the known world at that time but to unite the people of different races and creed and to build an empire the like of which the world had never known. Though many in the Empire remained faithful to their original religion, most embraced Islam and the Arab language. The community of the Muslims grew far bigger than the sum total of Arabs and they went on to achieve glory for Allah for 13 centuries. There was no talk then that the world belongs to the infidels, the kafir, and that for the Muslims, Allah has prepared for them heaven in the hereafter. They therefore should not seek to widen their territories nor strive to increase the number of Muslims.

9. The Muslims of the Golden Age of Islam must have been tolerant because they were ready to study the works of the ancient scholars including the Greek philosophers in order to add to their knowledge and to apply them. Today we read of the great Muslim scientists, doctors and mathematicians; the great navigators, the experts in metal and glass work, the producers of all kinds of quality goods to meet the needs of their people and the rest of the world. But to their ranks we add no more nor do we care to achieve the greatness of those Muslims of the past.

10. But we know that today we Muslims are less tolerant. We regard only the study of religion and its practices, the enhancement of religious rituals not originally prescribed as the only thing that should be incumbent upon us. Anything else carries no merit and should not occupy our time. Religion is about rituals, to be observed in order to get merit in the afterlife.

11. We cannot determine the exact date when we became less tolerant and reject what we claim to be unIslamic and not religious. Some even go so far as to describe everything that is not directly concerned with the knowledge of Islam and the Islamic rituals as being secular and must be rejected. But the decline of the Muslims must coincide with this date of rejection. We say it does not matter because we are destined for heaven while those who are successful in this world

would end up in hell.

12. But do we know for certain that we are without sin and are destined for heaven? The al-Quran has enjoined upon us to ensure the safety of ourselves as Muslims by being prepared with all the worldly needs to defend ourselves and to frighten our enemies. It is quite obvious that we have not heeded this injunction. As a result the Muslims all over the world are oppressed. Many have been forced to emigrate to non-Muslim countries. We cannot claim to be emulating the early Muslims who went to a Christian country to save themselves. They were running away from the non-Muslim Mekah. Today Muslim emigrants are running away from Muslim land, from fellow Muslims.

13. Can we say that being dependent upon non-Muslims for our defence is in accord with the teachings of Islam? We perform the Haj every year flying in aircrafts made by non-Muslims, sometimes piloted by non-Muslims. What this mean is that without the technology of the non-Muslims a much lesser number of us would be able to perform the Haj. We say that aiding someone in the performance of a necessary `ibadah' is as incumbent (wajib) upon us as the performance of the `ibadah' itself. We have done little and are quite incapable of aiding fellow Muslims in the performance of the Haj. Can we believe that we have not disobeyed the injunction of our religion? Can we believe that we have not sinned for failing to perform the `Fardu Kifayah' by preparing for the defence of the `ummah' or by helping the `ummah' to perform an enjoined ritual? Can we truly believe that we have a place in heaven despite these failures and many other failures?

14. We should not be too complacent about our place in the `akhirat' . We should really examine whether all that we need to do is to focus on the performance of `Fardu Ain' for ourselves and ignore our other worldly duty. Does Islam teach us to be selfish and perform only those rituals which will gain merit for us alone and ignore our duties to the Muslim community which are equally enjoined by Islam? Can we ignore `Fardu Kifayah' because we have perform `Fardu Ain' for ourselves?

15. We say proudly that Islam is no ordinary faith. It is a way of life. Is the way of life that the Muslims must practise limited entirely to preparing for the `akhirat' through the performance of rituals and esoteric prayers while neglecting the well-being of the `ummah' completely, while letting Muslims to be oppressed, while quarrelling and fighting each other? If we think that is what is meant by the Islamic way of life, then there is nothing more to be said. But I don' t believe that the Islamic way of life is limited to the performance of the compulsory rituals and the acquisition of religious knowledge which gains merit for oneself only. The Islamic way of life is the way that will ensure that Muslims and Islam are highly regarded and respected, that Muslims and their countries are not oppressed, that Muslim Governments are skilled in administration and able to provide the necessities of life, that they can govern wisely and with justice; that Muslims are also foremost in the field of worldly knowledge and skills, that they are able to exploit the resources Allah has given them, that they are benignly rich and considerate of the poor and the miserable, whether Muslims or non-Muslims,

that they are the epitome of all that is virtuous and honourable in the human race.

16. There is a view that the religious rituals we perform are mere expressions of the faith and carry no guidance for the life of Muslims. It is enough to perform them and to gain merit thereby. There is nothing else to be learnt from the rituals that we perform. But others believe that these rituals have something more to teach us, so we may be better Muslims.

17. The Haj cannot be just a ritual which we perform because we are enjoined to perform so we may gain merit for the next world. The Haj must surely be more than that. There must be more lessons from the Haj for us Muslims. There must be some significance in what we do and in our expression of total submission to Allah.

18. You are here at this International Conference on Haj Guidance to expand our knowledge and lessons from the performance of the Haj. I am sure that Allah will give you guidance and that you in turn will be able to enlighten us, the Muslim 'ummah'. The Muslims are in dire need of guidance for many of us have lost our way. We want to return to the right path. But we are confused by the myriads of interpretations of our religion, and we are thus unable to derive from this great religion the essence that will make us true followers and a great people once again.

19. You will not be able to solve everything but we hope to be better enlightened by your deliberations.

20. On this note, I have great pleasure in opening this First International Conference on Haj Guidance.