

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE RISEAP FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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TIME:

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan;

Saudara-saudari sekalian.

Syukur kita ke hadrat Allah Subhanahu Wataala kerana dengan limpah dan rahmatNya dapat kita bersama-sama di Majlis yang berbahagia ini. Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada pihak penganjur kerana menjemput saya ke majlis ini serta memberi peluang kepada saya untuk bertukar-tukar fikiran dengan para hadirin sekalian. Saya percaya banyak perkara akan dibincangkan di persidangan ini dan saya yakin persidangan ini akan dapat melahirkan sesuatu yang akan memberi manfaat kepada masyarakat Islam khususnya dan masyarakat keseluruhan amnya.

My Brothers and Sisters,

2. It gives me great pleasure to be with you at this Fourth General Assembly of the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of South East Asia and the Pacific or RISEAP. This part of the world is, I believe, the only region where Muslim voluntary organisations have got together to cooperate with each other at the non-governmental level. I take this opportunity to commend RISEAP, under the dedicated leadership of YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, for its activities in Islamic dakwah in this region.

3. I have been informed that RISEAP has also produced a film about the Quran and science. I am sure it will constitute an important contribution to Islamic dakwah. In this technological age, Muslims must accept and apply modern technology to further spread the word of Islam. We cannot afford the kind of negativism which for a long time rejected all kinds of images, still as well as moving, as against Islamic teaching, only to be forced in the end to modify our views in the face of the realities around us. Similarly for a long time it was thought improper to fly in order to perform the Haj. Yet today because flying is cheaper and more convenient more Muslims are able to perform the Haj. Imagine how few would perform the Haj if the beliefs of some people that the only way to perform the Haj is to walk all the way to Mecca. These people seem to think that self-torture is a way of getting merit in Islam. Rejection

of new and technologically better ways of doing things should not be simply because they are new and better and impose less hardship on us. We should reject them only if they are completely contrary to Islam. Otherwise we should find some good uses for them, uses which are not against Islam.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Most of the delegates to this meeting come from countries where Muslims are a minority. We are apt to consider our situations as unfortunate when compared to those countries where Muslims make up the majority and the governments are controlled by Muslims. Let us remember, however, that even in countries where Muslims are a majority, they are not always free from oppression or injustice. Let us not forget how frequently Muslim countries fall into the hands of non-Muslim enemies because of the weakness or incompetence of Muslims. What is important is not our numbers but how we organise and work for our own benefit. Muslim communities who are minorities in many countries have remained true to the faith and have prospered because they assess the situation correctly and "use their tongue and their heart" as enjoined by Allah in the Quran. Practical plans, programmes and approaches should replace the misguided fanaticism which often divide and even destroy Muslim majorities elsewhere.

5. The need for education is one factor which seems to be common in most Muslim minority communities. It is fashionable for some Muslims to follow the Christian separation of education into religious and secular. When Muhammad s.a.w. enjoined upon the Muslims to seek knowledge even in China, he did not specify that the knowledge is secular. The important thing was to acquire knowledge, in other words to acquire education. The Quran also enjoined upon us to study the earth and the mountains and the camel, all of which are the creations of Allah. Again, there was no mention that these are secular knowledge. Because great Muslims like Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun and others followed the injunctions of Allah and His Prophet to study these subjects, they did not become secularists. They became great Muslims instead and their knowledge have bestowed 'nikmat' not only on Muslims but on Mankind. If Muslims are to benefit from education they should forget this division of education into secular and religious. All education for the good of Muslims and Mankind are religious. The study of the Quran and the Hadith, if done with the intention of misusing them is no more religious than the study of other subjects with similarly bad intentions. It is the 'niat' and the application that makes any education good or bad. If we can appreciate this, then the mental block among Muslims about education can be overcome and we will be stronger and better able to defend and propagate our faith.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. We are concerned about the leadership crises which so frequently seem to plague Muslim organisations. The role of Muslim leaders, particularly in Muslim organisations, is to be the humble servant of the community, Islam and Allah. The leaders should not be motivated by desire for position, glory, prestige or benefits. There must be a real spirit and willingness to sacrifice among the leaders of Muslim organisations. We must ensure that only those with the intellectual, moral and spiritual capacities are chosen to lead Muslims. Those elected to office in any organisation must play an effective role, not remain apathetic and indifferent to events happening around them.

7. The essence of Islam is faith, the belief in Allah and His Prophet. Far too frequently we add another factor -- exclusiveness. While we want Muslims to be together to safeguard their faith and the required expressions of this faith, it is not necessary for us to keep away from those of other faiths. How can we bring to them the message of Allah if we cannot meet them at all? How can we show them the goodness, the greatness and the tranquility of Islam if we never have contact with them at all?

8. The Prophet himself did not segregate the Muslims from the non-Muslims. Indeed from the very beginning his work way among the Jahiliah including members of his own family. He himself visited the Jews and attended their funerals. But we have decided to ignore this sunnah of the Prophet. We confine ourselves to ourselves. While we feel free to accept charity from others, we restrict our charity only to those of the Faith. We seldom participate even in non-religious inter-communal activities. We reduce to the barest minimum our contact with others.

9. The result is that Islam tends to be the most misunderstood religion among non-Muslims. And because they do not understand, they are frequently antagonistic. There is an unnecessary friction between us and them, whether we are in the minority or majority. They fear us and suspect that we are trying to force-convert them. They fear conversion because Islam is perceived as a series of restrictions on everything that they cherish.

10. We should ask ourselves now whether this segregationist attitude is Islamic and whether it is not doing Islam untold damage? If our 'iman' is strong, there is really no fear that we will lose our faith simply because we mingle with non-Muslims. Strong in our faith as Muslims usually are, the easy relations with non-Muslims will not affect us but it will diminish somewhat the unreasoning fear and antagonism displayed by non-Muslims, particularly the Christians. Muslims would then be more free to practice their faith without attracting the abuse and obstruction that often trouble Muslim minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. It is important for Muslim organisations such as RISEAP to cultivate a spirit of sacrifice among Muslims. All efforts of mobilisation and organisation will not be fully effective unless Muslims understand that they must devote some of their time, money and energy for the cause of Islam . They should not be always calculating the merits they gain in after-life for each act in the practice of Islam. A good act should be performed simply because it is good. Islam does not even require the beneficiary of the zakat to be obliged to the donor because the beneficiary is merely taking his right. In Islam all praise is to Allah. We are not entitled to be praised for simply fulfilling the injunctions of Islam. A good Muslim should not expect returns, much less evaluate the merit gained, when he gives some of his time, money and energy as required by Islam in the interest of the faith.

12. Far too often Muslim organisations fail because of misunderstandings on the part of its officials. A negative attitude pervades the organisation when leaders fall out. The objectives of the organisation, certainly the real interest of Islam, fall victim to this petty squabbling. Unless we discard this attitude, Muslims will remain divided and weak.

13. Islam gives a sense of direction to a society but Muslim societies -- whether Muslims are in a majority or a minority -- often show a conspicuous absence of a sense of direction. Planning seems to be anathema to us. Despite the fact that we know that we have a duty to ensure the well-being of Islam and the Muslims, we confine our thoughts and energy to the immediate performance of our ibadah only. And we interpret ibadat in the narrowest sense, so that the welfare and perpetuation of the faith and the ummah is often excluded as ibadat.

14. Some people believe that belief in God and piety alone will ensure a revival of Islam. What matters most according to them is correct aqidah or faith, and God will ensure the rest. They forget that in many regions of the world, Islam and the Muslims have been wiped out because they were not able to resist the onslaught of the intellectual and physical superiority of their adversaries. Had Mustafa Kamal been unable to retake Anatolia, for example, there would be no Turkey today. Certainly, the resurgence of Islam there would not be possible.

15. In spite of all the talk of Islamic resurgence, there cannot be any real resurgence and permanency without an intellectual base, a solid foundation of contemporary ideas and analysis derived from the primary sources of Islam -- the Quran and Sunnah. Faith is important but faith alone cannot sustain all Muslims. The Quran has said that poverty

is close to a lack of faith. In other words, our faith weakens when we are poor. If we take poverty to mean not just monetary poverty but to include poverty of skills, of ideas, of education, of intellectual capacity, then we must realise how close we are to losing our faith. If we are merely rich in religious knowledge and the performance of our ibadat, we may find ourselves quite incapable of defending the faith effectively.

16. In planning for Islamic resurgence, ijthad or intellectual struggle must go hand in hand with jihad in specific areas. Due emphasis must be given to all aspects of society and allowances must be made for both unity of goals and diversity of actions. The solutions to the contemporary and future problems of Muslim societies must emerge from within the unified yet diverse intellectual heritage of Islam. We cannot go on devoid of original intellectual content. We must be willing to borrow ideas which are not contrary to our faith and to modify them as much as we must devise new ideas to meet the challenges of our times. The Quran and the Sunnah must guide us but we cannot solve present day problems by retreating into the past. The attempt by misguided Muslims to return to what they term as Islamic fundamentals has neither been successful nor has it helped to resolve the problems of modern day life. Indeed, it has endangered the situation of the Muslims by making them incapable of fending for themselves when faced with threats to their existence. The Muslims have always had to seek the help of others because they cannot help themselves and each other.

17. It is imperative that Muslims face reality. There is really no true Islamic resurgence presently. If there is, then Muslims would be dominant in the modern world. Instead, we are being battered and bruised not only by attacks by people antagonistic towards us but by the fighting a mong ourselves.

18. Sometimes we talk of the past glories of Islam. This really is an admission that Islam is not glorious now. It is not glorious because we have forsaken the true teachings of Islam. When we are asked to be brothers, we fight each other. When we are asked to seek knowledge, we discriminate against this knowledge and that knowledge. When we are enjoined to be honest, to work hard, to be disciplined, we discount these and seek only solace and merit in afterlife for ourselves without regard for the permanency and spread of Islam.

19. We have changed the values that Islam teaches us. We deny many of the messages in the Quran. Some even go so far as to say that certain parts of the Quran can no longer be accepted because they do not fit in with the interpretations that is currently favoured. Thus they say that the passage which permits others their faith and we ours, is no longer valid because they want Islam to be rigid and intolerant of

others and their rights. Despite the injunction that there is no compulsion in Islam they would like to compel when they have the power to do so.

20. But the glory of Islam can be restored. There can be a resurgence of Islam if we return to the true teachings of Islam. This can only come about if there is ijihad in the true meaning of the word. Learned Muslims from all disciplines must give their thoughts to the correct interpretations of Islam. The reality of life in the twentieth century must be given due consideration. We must be prepared to admit that we may have been wrong in our present interpretation and to correct them. Then and then only can a true Islamic resurgence take place and Islam's gloryre stored.

21. The tendency to condemn as heretical anything that we disagree with, must be resisted. We must have an open mind and whatever our status, we must be humble enough to remember that we are human as were the old interpreters of Islam. Therefore, we and they could have been wrong. It is inconceivable that if we follow the injunctions of Islam correctly we should be so oppressed in this world which belongs to Muslims as much as to others. The fact that we are, must be because we have done wrong or we have misinterpreted Islam. Islam, the religion perfected by Allah, cannot be wrong.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. I now have much pleasure in declaring open this Fourth General Assembly of RISEAP.