

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

EVENT: THE MEETING AND DIALOGUE SESSION WITH MOROCCAN ISLAMIC INTELLECTUALS,
THINK TANKS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS

VENUE: RABAT, MOROCCO

DATE: 16 APR 2002

TIME:

ENHANCING THE IMAGE OF ISLAM

I would like to thank the organisers, the Moroccan Islamic Intellectuals, Think Tanks and Parliamentarians for the opportunity to meet and interact with you.

2. Muslims throughout the world are very concerned about the poor image of Islam, the weakness of the Muslims and their oppression by others. The fate of the Palestinians is of course a good example of how far we have regressed since the great days of the Islamic civilisation. Today Muslims can be terrorised with impunity by just about anybody. And Muslim countries can do nothing to help beyond appealing to the rest of the world, the non-Muslim world to intervene and put an end to the misery of our Muslim brothers. And we know how unproductive is such an appeal.

3. Many of us are resigned to our fate. We believe there is nothing we can do. Some even console themselves with the belief that we will enjoy a better life in the hereafter. We believe that this life, this world is for the infidels. They can enjoy life now because they will be going to hell after death. And so we endure and we do nothing to improve our situation.

4. Then there are those who get so frustrated and angry that they want to lash out against their tormentors blindly. Never mind the backlash against the Muslims. Never mind the futility of their efforts. What is important to them is that they can vent their anger. They believe they are fighting a holy war, a jihad. They believe that they will become martyrs whether they achieve anything or not.

5. We applaud their bravery but what they do does not help Islam or the Muslims. What they do does not improve the image of the Muslims. In fact they achieve the opposite effect.

6. Lashing out blindly in anger will not bring back the glory of the Muslim civilisation or Muslim power. It will not even achieve the immediate objective of punishing the enemy. It is not even Islamic.

7. If we cannot just resign ourselves to our fate, if we cannot fight back in anger, then what can we do?

8. We have a need to look to the past for guidance, to the history of the founding of Islam and the Muslim community and the creation of the Muslim empire. Indeed we have to look at, to study closely the struggles of the Prophet of Islam, himself. Muhammad s.a.w. the chosen of Allah, was the most outstanding leader and reformer in the history of mankind and he cannot but be the role model for us. It is not just because of our faith but he is indeed an exemplary model for us.

9. Favoured by Allah, chosen by Him, Muhammad s.a.w. struggles to spread the message of Islam could have been made easy. Allah had only to say "Be" and it will "Be". But the Prophet was not given an easy passage. He had to struggle against tremendous odds for a third of his lifetime. He had difficulty even to convince close family members and friends. He was vilified in Mekah, chased out of Taif, and had to escape to Madinah when his enemies wanted to kill him. He lost and won battles, was seriously wounded and was betrayed by some of his own followers.

10. But we know he succeeded. He succeeded because of his belief, his faith in his role as the Messenger of Allah, his willingness to suffer the trials and tribulations, his tenacity and his patience. He did not just pray for divine help but for 23 long years, he worked hard and when he died as all mortals must die, he had set Islam on such a firm footing that 1400 years later 1.3 billion people still adhere to Islam.

11. If today the Muslims are oppressed and hunted like animals sometimes, it is not because of Islam, it is because we have not taken the struggles of our Prophet as our guide, as an example of how to overcome adversity and how to succeed. It is because by and large we have not adhered to the true teachings of Islam. We are too much involved in the interpretation, reinterpretation and reinterpreting the reinterpretation of the esoteric aspects of Islam that we have become confused and we have ignored even the clear fundamental teachings of Islam.

12. We are enjoined to seek hassanah in this world and in the next but clearly we are not striving hard enough for hassanah in this world, or else why are we in such a terrible state now. Allah wants us to achieve a balance between dunia and akhirat. But we are instead abandoning this world to the non-believers while striving only for the akhirat. This is against the fundamentals of Islam.

13. Then there is the brotherhood of the Muslims which Islam enjoins upon us. Can we say that we Muslims are brothers? If we are then can we squabble among ourselves on what to do while our brothers in Palestine and elsewhere are being slaughtered? Every time a proposal is made to solve a problem we cannot unanimously agree to the proposal. And if we make a counter proposal the others will not agree either. And so we remain divided and have never achieved the unity of the Muslim brotherhood. In fact when we call ourselves the Muslim Brotherhood the first thing we do is to condemn other Muslims and to kill them even. Yet we know that the first thing the Prophet did was to unite the warring Arab tribes through Islam, to make them brother of each other and to start the spread of Islam aided by the previously warring tribes.

14. We all know this of course. We all know the Quran and the Hadith and we can quote the passages at any time. But can we honestly say we practice what is taught us by the Quran and the Hadith?

15. The early Muslims were great scholars, scientists, mathematicians and doctors. Today other than those learned in religion there is hardly any Muslim scholars, scientists, mathematicians and doctors of good repute. Yet we know that the Quran urges us to observe the creations of Allah, the sky and the earth, the rain that falls, the plants that grow as a result, so the animals can eat and we can use them for food and for transport.

16. Are we being asked merely to observe these things or are we supposed to study these creations of Allah so that we can apply them for the betterment of our lives? Surely observation means study. Obviously we are not studying. And yet when others apply their observations of Allah's creation and produce food and the products which enhance the quality of our lives we are quick to use them, to pay high prices for them.

17. Why are we not studying Allah's creation? About a century before the fall of Muslim Spain, Muslims were urged to study only religion and nothing else. Today we are still urged to neglect other knowledge except religious knowledge. Other knowledge is regarded as secular and will not give us merit for akhirat. As a result Muslims everywhere are backward, badly educated and are incapable of applying modern knowledge in the administration and development of Muslim countries, in their defence and the protection of the ummah.

18. Unfortunately we are not even learning the true teachings of our religion. What we learn is the appearances or the forms rather than the substance of religious teachings.

19. What is strongly enjoined upon us to carry out is often ignored. It is for example the duty of Muslims to prepare for the defence of the ummah. But instead of emphasising defence we think of keeping horses as the sunnah of the Prophet. And so we do not learn the sciences and the skills to make the modern weapons of war. We are happy to buy them second hand.

20. As Muslims we must know our religion. We must study it. We must understand enough not to deviate or to be misled. But surely this level of understanding will not take up all our time. Surely we will have time to study and acquire the knowledge needed for us to be able to invent and produce our needs, for our everyday life, for our community and most importantly for the defence of the ummah. Still we accept that some of us must spend their whole life to study religion but must all of us be experts in religion and nothing else.

21. We missed the Industrial Revolution because we were suspicious of the products of industry. It is difficult to imagine now but for a long time we did not allow the Quran to be printed, we did not allow our mosques to be lit up by electricity, we were even against paintings, photography and the television. Some Muslim religious scholars even refuse to believe that man had landed on the moon. But we cannot reject reality. Some of us try to recreate the environment of 1400 years ago because we believe that we can live the life of true Muslims by so doing. But actually we are denigrating Islam by inferring that Islam is suitable for life in that period only. We must certainly know that Islam is for all times. Islam is as suitable today as it was when the Prophet was alive.

22. Because we missed the Industrial Revolution, our countries failed to develop and benefit from the advances made possible by modern industry. We have to depend on others for our needs. And being dependent mean not being independent.

23. Currently the world is going through the Information Revolution. It looks like we may miss this revolution also. And our independence will be eroded further.

24. The world that we live in today is a world that has been shaped by others. It is so because we are weak and disunited. We cannot ignore this new world however. We cannot isolate ourselves. The world will not let us. We have therefore to develop our capacities to deal with the new challenges facing us.

25. There was a time where we could do what we like within our borders. But globalisation implies a borderless world and we cannot hide behind our borders

any more. The assault against us will not be military but economic.

26. Globalisation is about economics, about economic management, economic development, economic strength and economic forces. If we fail to develop economically, we will go under, we will be dominated and will lose our independence even though not a single foreign soldier will step on our soil.

27. It is therefore imperative that apart from acquiring modern knowledge we emphasise the study of modern economics and finance and we learn economic management. Whether our countries will survive or not will depend on how much we understand the science and art of building economic strength. The development of our countries depend on this. Industrialisation, trade and prudent financial management are more important than political skills or even military strength and prowess. Being brave and being ready to die for Islam, is not enough and may even be counter productive.

28. We are seeing today rich countries being impoverished because of the lack of skills to manage foreign debt, or to attract foreign direct investments, or to export and to trade and to handle a thousand and one economic problems. Perfectly good economies can suddenly come under attack of speculators and impoverished literally overnight.

29. Skilful and unscrupulous people are on the lookout for opportunities to exploit the weaknesses of countries. They control the world media which aid and abet them in creating an atmosphere conducive for their exploitation. Once they have impoverished a country their colleagues move in to pick the pieces. You cannot fight them with military forces. You can only fight them with financial and economic management skills.

30. Out there the great banks and corporations are furiously merging and acquiring each other in order to become even bigger. They will talk about level playing fields but they learn that size will determine who wins. And they want to be the biggest in their fields.

31. Once there was opposition to monopolies and anti-trust laws were enacted. Today no one is stopping the corporations from trying to monopolise business worldwide. In any industry, there will eventually be only two or three players. They will dominate the world. They will be so big and powerful that governments will have to bow to them. If governments refuse they have merely to pull out and governments and countries will be practically bankrupted.

32. The international financial system of today gives

tremendous power to those with access to capital. Obviously the poor countries will not have the capital to counter their attacks. The reserves that they have are nothing compared to the funds that the speculators have at their disposal. Once they attack, defence would be quite impossible. And so, strong economies can go under unless they have managed their finances and economy well and can find some ways to retain their integrity.

33. I am painting a black picture of the future for the developing countries because the future is really not promising. We can only defend ourselves if the economic management of our countries is good. And to be good we must have the knowledge and the skills to administer and develop our countries, to understand the international economic and financial systems, and to be united in protecting our interest. We fail to do so at our own peril. Once dominated it would be extremely difficult for us to release ourselves. We cannot blame others for really we are to blame because we have our priorities wrong, because we did not seek to balance the hassanah in this world, with the hassanah in the next, because we seek divine help without helping ourselves first.

34. Today the image of Islam is far from being that of the Islam of the Prophet. Despite the 1.3 billion Muslims in this world we are unable to do anything for ourselves. We live at the mercy of others. If they want to, they can wipe us out with the nuclear bombs that they have. In fact it is rumoured that destroying Mekah and Madinah with nuclear bombs was one of the options some people were thinking of in the aftermath of the September 11th attack.

35. Yet it is well within our means to develop and grow and to equip ourselves with all the wherewithal needed to gain the respect of the world, to change the image of Islam for the better. Allah has given us so much wealth already. All that is really needed is for us to use this wealth prudently. Only when we have seriously made the effort can we expect success through divine intervention.