

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

EVENT: MUSLIM UNITY IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES AND THREATS

VENUE: UNIVERSITY AL AZHAR, CAIRO, EGYPT

DATE: 21 JAN 2003

TIME:

"Muslim Unity in the Face of Challenges and Threats"

There has never been a time when the Muslims are so looked down upon, so treated with disrespect and so oppressed as they are today. Everywhere Muslims are bullied, detained bombed and massacred with impunity.

2. The Muslim countries are unable to do anything to defend themselves and their people and fellow Muslims anywhere. Some Muslim countries actually appear to be collaborating with the oppressors of Muslims.

3. Many Muslims try to explain the sad plight of the Muslims by saying that this world is not for us. For us a place in heaven has been reserved. In the next world the enemies of Islam would be punished and thrown into hell because of what they do to us in this world.

4. Is this truly what Islam teaches us? Did the Prophet S.A.W. accept his persecution because his place in heaven has been assured? Did he relish the fact that his Quraish persecutors would end up in hell? What would have happened to the spread of Islam if the Prophet had not struggled against his enemies, dispatched his early followers to safe havens, migrated to Madinah to build up the strength of the Muslims, increasing their numbers in order to fight back? If he had retreated to await his reward after death, we would not be Muslims today.

5. And we know in the end he defeated his enemies and was able to spread Islam throughout the world, to build the greatest Empire and civilisation in history. Clearly the Prophet did not believe that for the Muslims this world is not important, this life is not important, this life on earth is only for the infidels. He not only believed that Muslims have a share of Allah's bounties on earth but that Muslims must be prepared to fight for their earthly share. Allah could have said "Kun, Fayakun" "Be, and it shall be" but Allah left His messenger to struggle and fight to spread Islam and to gain for the Muslims their share in

this world.

6. So the idea that we must suffer in silence and await our heaven in the next world is not Islamic. In fact it goes against the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Quran enjoins upon us to prepare to deter and defeat the enemy with force of arms - with war-horses, bows and arrows in those days. Many think that if we have war-horses then we have fulfilled our obligations. But what is important is not war-horses or bows and arrows. What is important is to deter and defeat our enemies. And to do this today we need guns and rockets, warships and warplanes, armoured cars etc. We cannot depend on others to supply us with these things forever, least of all by those who are opposed to us. We need to invent, design, produce and test our own weapons of defence. To do this we need to have scientific and technological knowledge and skills. Those who learn science, mathematics and acquire technological skills are therefore obeying and fulfilling the injunctions of Islam. Those who prevent them from studying these subjects by saying that only learning religion will earn us merit are in fact going against the teachings of Islam for they weaken the Muslim ummah and prevent them from putting fear in the hearts of the enemies of Islam and becoming able to defeat them. These people who prevent Muslims from having their own capacity to protect themselves are actually helping the oppression of the Muslims.

7. Our enemies will always attack us because we are weak. They will only cease to do so if we maintain a strong enough defence capability. This is the Sunnah of the Prophet. Just as the followers of the Prophet had to develop and acquire skills to make bows and arrows and other weapons, we have to develop and acquire skills to make modern weapons.

8. Why are we not doing this? The reason is because those who interpret Islam to us did not stress these very fundamental teachings of Islam. In telling us that science and technology are secular subjects which will not earn us merit in the afterlife, they are discouraging Muslims and their societies from fulfilling the injunctions of Islam to be equipped with the means of defending ourselves and to deter the enemy. During the glorious years of the Muslim civilisation we were not oppressed. Muslims were respected and feared. That was because Muslim countries were strong militarily and economically, and advanced in the sciences. Europeans had to learn from Muslims new knowledge as well as those of the Greeks and others, which the Muslims had studied, translated into Arabic and enhanced.

9. We all know that the Prophet S.A.W. brought only one Islam. The Islam that he received from Allah

S.W.T. is only one. But today there are many Islamic religions. There are the Sunni and the Shiah, each divided into numerous groups by the different imams and tarikats. Had Allah S.W.T. wanted us to have all these religions then the Prophet would have conveyed this to the first Muslims, would have taught Sunni Islam, Shiah Islam etc. But we know that during his 23 years of teaching Islam he did not speak about Sunni or Shiah or the various tarikats. All these divisiveness in Islam came only after he had passed away. They are the results of differing interpretations about Islam by different scholars through the centuries.

10. Some of these interpretations and teachings are so different from each other that their followers actually accuse each other of not being Muslims. Indeed they regard many who profess to be Muslims as infidels. Thus Sunni Muslims regard the Shiah as infidels and vice versa.

11. In Malaysia one political party has convinced its followers that anyone not joining or supporting it is not a Muslim. Tens of thousands of Malay Muslims believe this, believe even that voting for this party in elections will guarantee a place for them in heaven. It sounds ridiculous except that the followers are deadly serious in their acceptance and belief, and in their enmity towards those who do not join this party or vote in elections for it. There is now a deep split among the Muslims of Malaysia, caused by Muslim politicians abusing the teachings of Islam.

12. Because of the thousands of different interpretations of Islam and very many different sects, each claiming to be the true followers of Islam, the Muslims are thoroughly confused. They are even more confused because they are told that the door of ijtihad or interpretations of Islam is closed and they must accept anything that had been interpreted long ago. Yet the very people who tell us that we may not reexamine and reinterpret Islam are themselves making new interpretations every day. And their interpretations are meant only to enhance their position in the community, to ensure support for their politics.

13. The result of this confusion is a deeply divided ummah, prone to disputes and to fighting each other. They are less interested in defending themselves against the professed enemies of Islam than they are in opposing other Muslims. That these conflicts among Muslims will only weaken the Muslims is totally ignored by them.

14. Disunited, confused about Islam, fighting each other for power, lacking in essential knowledge and skills, misapplying their God-given wealth, the Muslims

of today have reached the lowest point in their development. Still they go on doing what is prohibited by Islam and damaging to themselves. Still they are not willing to see the reality of their situation or to admit that they have deviated from the teachings of Islam. They continue to reject the brotherhood of Muslims.

15. Frustrated and angry some Muslims have resorted to terrorism. Many believe they have been successful in this. But what have the Muslims really gained by these acts of terror? All that has happened is that the enemies of Islam have found justification for putting more pressure on the Muslims, attacking and killing them, treating them and their religion with contempt.

16. Muslims fight and die not in order to achieve any real objective, to free themselves from oppression for example. They fight and they die in order to retaliate, in order to take revenge, in order to vent their anger.

17. Muslims seem not to plan or strategise. Even their terror attacks seem to be random attacks, isolated and uncoordinated. Everyone of them seems to be acting on their own. If they plan it does not seem to be coordinated, nor to advance their cause. Apart from making their enemies angry and providing excuses for them to retaliate, nothing which can contribute towards ultimate Muslim success or victory has been achieved.

18. The Muslims have clearly lost their way. There is a saying in Malay that when you lose your way, you must return to the beginning and start again. With so many contradictory interpretations of Islam over the last 1400 years, most of us have become so confused that we really do not know whether we are right or wrong, whether we are taking the right path or not, whether indeed we are following the teachings of Islam. Certainly we are nowhere near achieving the greatness that was once Islam. If at all, we seem to be slipping further and further away from it.

19. Since we are so confused and divided because of the varied interpretations and teachings of Islam, we should really return to the fundamentals of Islam, to the original teachings of the Prophet, to the Quran and the verified Hadiths, especially those which are clear and indisputable and not subject to different interpretations. What is the most fundamental teaching of Islam. It is that Islam means peace. We greet each other with the wish for peace. Is it just an empty greeting which we do not mean or is it that we wish for peace because we really want peace? If we want peace then shouldn't we strive for peace, at least among ourselves as Muslims first, and then with people of

other faiths.

20. The Quran states that all Muslims are brothers. Apart from Islam advocating peace, surely brothers must not fight each other. Brothers should love each other, being as they are of the same family. Brothers should be united. That is the basic teachings of Islam. There can be no dispute about this injunction of Islam, no difference in the interpretation of this teaching.

21. But Muslims do try to negate even this clear teaching of Islam. They are fond of declaring that other Muslims are not true Muslims; in fact they are infidels because they believe in different imams, belong to different mazhabs or sects, being Sunni or Shiah, followers of different tarikats etc. Far from accepting all Muslims as their brothers they adopt dress codes which differentiate them from other Muslims whom they condemn as being less Muslim for not wearing their dress. But the Quran is explicit as to who is and who is not a Muslim. According to the Quran a Muslim is one who "bears witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet." Even if he or she commits sins, big or small, he or she remains a Muslim for as long as he or she "bears witness to Allah as the only God that is worshipped and that Muhammad is His Prophet."

22. So all the Muslims, all those who bear witness to Allah as the only God that they worship and that Muhammad is His Prophet must be brothers, must be at peace with each other and must be united. We can have our worldly difference, we can have our quarrels as brothers often do, but we would still be brothers and behave like brothers. Why should Islam advocate the brotherhood of Muslims if they are meant to behave not as brothers? If Muslims are expected to behave as enemies of each other then Allah would not declare that all Muslims are brothers.

23. Peace and the brotherhood of Muslims are fundamental teachings of Islam. If we uphold this fundamental injunction of Islam alone, there will be Muslim unity and they will be strong. The Muslims were not meant to have countries and to be divided according to race or nation. They were, everyone of them members of the great Muslim community, the ummah. But now the Muslims have divided themselves into different states and their loyalty to their state is more than to Islam. In the pursuit of the interests of their respective countries, they are quite prepared to fight their Muslim brothers from other countries; they are quite prepared to be divided, to join opposing camps, even those of their non-Muslim enemies.

24. They are already weak. Divided they are weaker. Unable to protect themselves from other Muslims and

from other enemies they allow themselves to be manipulated against their co-religionists. They become pawns in the games other people play. Truly they have lost self-respect. Truly they are not following the teachings of Islam.

25. Blaming others for our sad fate may only be partially correct. But there is very little we can do to get others, our enemies, to cease oppressing us. On the other hand if we blame ourselves there is something that we can do to overcome our own faults and weaknesses. It is therefore much better if we look for and recognise our own faults.

26. Muslims must surely know what is it that they are doing which is wrong. Certainly their disunity, their rejection of Islamic brotherhood is wrong. They do not have the right priorities either, emphasising the avoidance of minor sins while openly committing major sins.

27. But beyond that they have, often deliberately, ignored or misinterpreted much of the basic teachings, the clear verses in the Quran. They often read the verses partially, ignoring the context, the parts which qualify the injunctions in the main parts of the verses.

28. Very often we miss completely the message, focusing on the form instead. Thus when we are asked to prepare war-horses so as to deter and defeat the enemy, it is not deterring and defeating the enemy that we take note of. It is the keeping of horses. Similarly when making judgement, it is not justice that we seek to achieve, it is the process of making the judgement. If the process is followed then even if injustice is the result, we believe we have followed what our religion enjoins upon us to do. We ignore completely the injunctions of the Quran that stresses making judgement with justice. And because we ignore this stress on justice enjoined by Islam, we create an image of Islam that is uncaring and unjust.

29. I will not cite more cases of the misinterpretation and deliberate ignoring of the teachings of Islam. It is because of this that Muslims of today are backward, lacking in knowledge, unable to defend themselves and their religion, and forced to resort to terror in order to seek revenge.

30. How long can we go on doing this? Will what we are doing today restore the greatness of our religion and the fitrah that it should be to mankind? Will it deliver us from oppression by our detractors?

31. Frankly I don't think so. It is not because we are incapable of developing ourselves to the level

where others would be forced to respect us and our religion. It is simply because we refuse to adhere to the true teachings of Islam and to strive to better our lot on this earth as much as we prepare for the life in the hereafter. We pray for hassanah in this world and for hassanah in the akhirat but we do nothing beyond merely asking Allah to help us in this world, and in the next. We ignore the Quranic injunction that Allah will not change our fate unless we strive to change it ourselves.

32. And so we will continue to be oppressed, to be attacked, bombed and killed, while our religion, Islam is condemned as false.

33. Many of you will say - who is he to talk about Islam. Don't listen to him even if what he says is true and is in accord with Islam.

34. That is your choice. Whether you sin or you gain merit, Allah S.W.T. will determine.