

**SPEECH BY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD AT KUALA LUMPUR
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“Civil State – Islamic Perspective”

1. As Chairman of this conference of Muslim thinkers, may I welcome all participants and observers to this three-day Summit on the “Civil State and the Islamic Perspective”.
2. We are holding this Summit because as Muslims we are worried and concerned about the state of affairs in the Muslim world. In particular we are concerned about the Civil State and its effect on Islamic countries.
3. We are faced with new ideas and challenges which are often contrary to the teachings of our religion. Our responses to these have been unstructured and is left to individuals with their own agenda.
4. For the most part we simply react to what we see as materialistic and against the teachings of Islam. Yet there are some who seem to embrace anything from the West.
5. Worse of all we react separately and emotionally, each moved by anger and a desire to hit back and to take revenge. Without unity or strategy, we simply become even more vulnerable, doing more damage to ourselves than to our detractors. And invariably our situation would worsen.
6. If we are to be effective in dealing with the new ideas, ideologies and value systems, we need to stop and think things out carefully and devise strategies and plans based on the careful analysis of what is happening to us, and what causes them to happen. In other words we need to diagnose the ills that have befallen us and the aetiology. After that only should we take action.
7. So what is happening to us? Very simply we have allowed ourselves to be so divided and weakened that our capacity to defend ourselves is no longer there. We are physically weak and intellectually moribund.
8. The process has been going on for centuries. It started when we were told that there is no merit in reading anything except about religion. With that the Muslim scientists, physicians and mathematicians disappeared. We even reject logic, the linking of cause and effect.
9. Instead we are told that if we beseech Allah to save us than we will be saved. We forget the injunction in the Quran that Allah s.w.t. will not help us unless we try to help ourselves first.

10. Not thinking, we strike out blindly at our detractors, seeking not to win and stop the attack, but merely to take revenge. You kill my people; we will kill your people. That is what moves us.

11. We have been doing this for very many years. But what is the result? The attacks became ever stronger and our sufferings get worse. We achieve nothing.

12. Apart from physical attacks, our minds too are facing ever more challenges. As with the physical assaults, our response to the attacks against our minds, our beliefs are not structured. No attempt is made by the ummah to understand the issues, to blunt the attacks through logic and strategy. We react mostly individually, each in his own way.

13. After the French Revolution the West promoted the idea of the equality of man. They reject the feudalism of their middle ages. Henceforth every citizen must be given the right in the governance of himself as a citizen. It was a very attractive idea to humankind at large. All embrace equality.

14. From then on new ideas have been added to increase the so-called rights of man. From just the right of women to vote for example, human rights was extended to all kinds of moral and religious restrictions. Gender equality became paramount. This soon resulted in downgrading of marriages and families. There is no need for marriage and a family may just be a man and a woman living together out of wedlock.

15. But why should marriage be between a man and a woman only? Why cannot the marriage be between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman? And so same sex marriage is legal in many Western countries.

16. Still more and more freedom are demanded. After doing away with feudalism, democracy is now almost a new religion. It challenges all beliefs. And now come the concept of a Civil State – a state ruled directly by the people, by everyone.

17. Basically the Civil State is against democratic principle. This is because even Government chosen by the majority must accept the voice of the minorities or be brought down through street demos, general strikes and now physical occupation of Government offices and parliament.

18. Through all these revolutions and evolutions, Muslims played no part. We believe that our absolute monarchs and strongman Governments would not be affected. And so no thoughts were directed at these new ideas on governance and how Muslims should deal with them. Muslim thinkers made no concerted efforts to understand what is going on. There is a naive belief that Muslims

would all reject ideas which seem to be contrary to the teachings of their religion. Debate and discussion as to how to deal with these ideologies were never seriously entered into.

19. And then, out of this blue an authoritarian Government was overthrown by the people. Quickly other Muslim countries followed suit. And the detractors gleefully named this the Arab Spring.

20. Hopes were raised that the overthrow of authoritarian Governments would result in democratic rule and a Civil State. And this would be good for Muslims and their countries.

21. The people came together to force the authoritarian rulers to resign. But they belong to different tribes, different factions and different religious sects. They came together not because of Islamic brotherhood or because of belonging to a single organization. Each group believed that they would be the Government after the overthrow.

22. But when elections were held, without exception the winning party would be accused of fraud and demos held to overthrow the winner.

23. In a democracy the essential element is for the losers to accept losing. The next election would provide another opportunity for the losers to try again.

24. Apparently this is not well understood. Abusing the democratic right to hold demos, the losers took to the streets to prevent the elected Government from functioning and to overthrow it.

25. The power of civil society is great. The minorities can actually overthrow the Government. But if this power is abused and Governments are overthrown indiscriminately, than anarchy would be the result.

26. Indeed we see this happening in at least one Muslim country. No sooner is a Government elected when the losers take to the street and hold general strikes so as to bring down the Government. A new election is held. This time the previous losers win. And immediately the overthrown Government party take to the streets and hold strikes to bring down the Government. And the Government falls. A new Government is elected only to fall following demonstrations and strikes. And so it goes on.

27. The power and freedoms of a civil society must be sparingly used. We need to limit the extent of the freedom we exercise. If democracy and a civil state is to succeed the losers must wait for the next election to make another bid. They may be successful. The new losers must now show the same constrain in the exercise of the power of minority in a civil state.

28. But the issues are not always political. Moral issues and standards may be challenged. Mention has already been made about gender equality and what it has led to.

29. Now we are seeing Islam being made used off by some Muslim groups to achieve power. By declaring that they are fighting for Islam and that dying would earn the fighter a place in heaven, Muslims are being made to ignore the teachings of Islam that all Muslims are brothers and that the killing of a Muslim by a Muslim is forbidden.

30. It is incumbent upon Muslim scholars and thinkers to ensure Muslims are guided by Islam as in the Quran and not by charlatans with their own agenda.

31. The onslaught of civil society on Islam can succeed if nothing is done to convince why these excessive liberalism is wrong. At the moment we have not debated this except for religious scholars saying that these are sinful things which Muslims cannot accept. The influence of Western thoughts is difficult for weak Muslims to reject.

32. We respect the Muslim scholars and their knowledge of the religion but additionally we need experts in other fields to provide other inputs and reasons beside just saying that LGBT is wrong and sinful. We need to have experts in other fields, experts in the sciences and in societal behaviour to challenge the liberalism of the West.

33. We have to admit that mere fatwas by religious scholars are inadequate today. I remember the fatwas which forbid the use of electric lights in mosques or the usage of motorised vehicles to carry the dead. The Janissaries of the Turkish Sultan once revolted when required to wear western-styled trousers and peak caps.

34. Today we ignore these fatwas as being invalid. We ignore them because the scholars' interpretation of the injunctions of our religion is wrong or unimplementable.

35. As to the images of people and animals, what is wrong is the worship of these images. The Jahiliah in their ignorance tended to worship images or sculptures. But today we have photography and even moving images of the cinemas and television. We cannot ban them. But we do not worship them. We only worship Allah. Therefore we are not breaching the teachings of our religion.

36. We need to have fatwas on the many challenges facing the Muslims. We need to decide on what we can accept and what we cannot. But the fatwas should be made only after a prolonged study and debate by all disciplines with due consideration being given to the realities of modern life.

37. Islam is not a religion for the first century of the Hijrah only. It is for all times. Certainly it is for our times as well. What we believe about our religion is what the scholars interpret for us. Their interpretation may be influenced by the realities of life during their times. It may not fit onto the realities now.

38. We cannot change the Quran. We have no need to change the Quran. The Quran is not wrong. It is perfect. But the interpretations can be wrong or inaccurate and over time they can become irrelevant, unable to cope with new ideas and realities. But we are told we cannot change the interpretations almost as if they are the words of Allah. We know that the verses of the Quran may be clear or they may be in the form of allegories. The clear one is easily understood but the allegories are open to interpretations to suit the situation. This being so, no one should say that only their interpretations should be accepted unquestioningly.

39. I have mentioned the wrong interpretation that were made regarding electricity, motor vehicle and men's dresses. And we no longer accept their interpretation.

40. But more seriously, their interpretation often differ from each other. And this has led to the break up of the Ummah into factions and sects, so that there is no more unity among the Ummah. In many instances they war with each other, declaring Muslims who do not accept their interpretations or ideas as apostates, as Kafirs.

41. There will be more of this split among Muslims. We have a need to do some heart searching, some revisions about the current teachings of Islam. We need to go back to the real source of our religion, to the Quran, the message of Allah s.w.t. to Muhammad, His Prophet for mankind.

42. I repeat there is nothing wrong with the Quran but there may be something wrong with our understanding and interpretations of its messages. Unless we return to the Quran and the learned in religion and other fields of knowledge among us and restudy the Quran and sincerely try to understand it and make new interpretations in the face of the troubles and disasters assailing us now, we will decline further. Remember the evil that befalls us is from us and the good is from Allah.

43. I hope this gathering of Muslim scholars and thinkers are prepared to examine our faults and going back to the Quran and the verified Hadiths, seek the guidance from Allah s.w.t. and true sunnahs of the Prophet, Muhammad s.a.w.

44. With this, in the name of Allah the Merciful and the Companionate I declare this Summit of Muslim Thinkers open.
