

SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY
DATO SERI DATIN PADUKA
DR. SITI HASMAH BTE HJ. MOHD. ALI
AT THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REGIONAL
ISLAMIC DAKWAH COUNCIL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND
THE PACIFIC (RISEAP) WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
AT KOMPLEKS TABUNG HAJI, KELANA JAYA
ON TUESDAY, 4TH. NOVEMBER, 1986
AT 9.00 A.M

Assalamu 'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

Mr. Chairman,

Yang Teramat Mulia

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj
President, RISEAP,

Yang Amat Berbahagia

Datin Patinggi Laila Taib
Chairman, RISEAP Women's Movement,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Brothers and Sisters-in-Islam.

All praise to Allah Subhanahu Wataala for His blessings and salutations to the Prophet Muhammed, may peace and blessings be upon him.

2. It is indeed an honour for me to be invited to officiate the First General Assembly of the Regional Islamic Dakwah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP)

Women's Movement this morning. May I congratulate the organizers for their initiative in organising this important meeting. Before I proceed further, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our sisters from Southeast Asia and the Pacific region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. It is indeed gratifying that voluntary Muslim organizations in this region have been working together for the progress of Islam and its Ummah in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. I am happy to note that Muslim women in this region have taken a bold step to hold their own meetings and plan their own programmes. The fact that all of you, representing Muslim voluntary organizations in this region, are striving hard for the cause of Islam, is a sign of an increasing awareness of the need for solidarity among Muslim women of non-governmental level. Such efforts can greatly complement the activities undertaken by governments of Islamic nations.

4. I am very glad that this first meeting of the RISEAP Women's Movement is being held in Malaysia. I recall that the First General Assembly of RISEAP was also held in Kuala Lumpur in June 1982. This is indeed a coincidence of historical importance for Malaysia. It is always Malaysia's intention to play an active role in the Islamic dakwah movement, both locally and internationally. Our policy is to be closely associated with Islamic nations and to support Islamic causes. In this regard, we believe that our participation - and also the participation of everyone else - should not only be active but also be effective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. We are living in a rapidly changing period in human history. Rapid changes have caused a certain degree of disorientation to everyone, and has affected family life.

Some people have lost their faith in religion completely while others have begin to understand the meaning of religion and the need for it. On balance, Islam has benefited for there is a widespread resurgence of Islam everywhere. By and large, there has been a greater appreciation of the role of Islam, especially among our young men and women.

6. It is estimated that the region of Southeast Asia and the Pacific has about 250 million Muslims scattered in various countries. There are only three countries in the region where Muslims form the majority of the populations. Almost fifty percent of the Muslims live in countries where they are minorities. The only Muslim countries in the region are Indonesia, (the country with the biggest number of Muslims in the world) Brunei and Malaysia. In the seventeen other countries, Muslims are minorities.

7. What is clear, ladies and gentlemen, is that the Muslims of this region, whether they are a majority or a minority, wish to maintain their Islamic identity. In order to maintain their Islamic identity they have to face many difficulties and challenges, but Islam has shown a resilience and power which enables its adherents to hold fast to their faith even in the most adverse circumstances.

8. Muslims who are living as minorities should not see their minority status as something negative or restrictive. They should take cognizance of their country's social environment, and adhere to the values and standards of Islam, accepting what is good and rejecting what is bad. What is important is that, as Muslims, we must uphold and practice the true teachings of Islam whose objective is universal good, equality and progress.

9. Furthermore, Muslims are members of a universal community of faith that transcends geographical and

political boundaries or racial and language barriers. By interacting with other Muslims in the region, and through RISEAP, I am sure MusJLim women would be able to seek comfort from their fellow sisters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. Muslim women, whether as minority or majority in any country, have an important role to play in society. This role is not limited only to the family, but also in the context of a nation. Islam teaches us to love our country, to love our neighbour and to love all Allah's creations. Islam, therefore, teaches us to cherish the highest of values that are universally accepted by mankind. Such values should be taught to our children from a young age so that they will grow up to be compassionate Muslims.

11. We cannot deny the fact that women constitute an important component of the Ummah. Islam accords a high status to women in society and as mothers we are the primary moulders of the future generation. However, in this fast changing world, women need to keep abreast of what is going on around them in order to bring up their children in the most proper way and to maintain and uphold Islamic values and the Islamic way of life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. There are many challenges facing our young people today. Western influence has encroached our daily lives and Western ills like rock culture, drug abuse, promiscuity and the like, seemed to have pervaded our societies. To counter this negative influence, women should be aware of their environment and take concerted action to protect their family.

13. It is therefore essential for Muslim women to get together and rally on a common cause. For some women,

joining a women's organization would be a logical step. There are numerous women's organizations looking into many issues pertaining to women. Because women's needs seemed to be different from that of men and youth, women's organizations are therefore essential to take up matters pertaining to women.

14. Not only do women need to know what is happening outside their home, they can also learn through the experiences of others how to improve themselves, their family or the home environment. Exposure to organizational and group activities may also help them to develop their talents and organizational skills which can be applied to helping other less fortunate women.

15. For Muslims who live as minorities in their respective countries, getting involved in da'awah organizations and activities become an added importance. Da'awah activities keep Muslim women in constant contact with each other. They gain moral support and strength from each other, enabling them to maintain their Muslim identity and to lead an Islamic way of life despite living in a non-Muslim environment.

16. For any organization to succeed, it needs dedicated and committed members and financial resources. There is no difficulty in getting women leaders, for there is no lack of talent among Muslim women. However, the difficulty is in getting women members. Women thus need to come forward to support and get involved with the various da'awah activities in their locality.

Fellow Sisters-in-Islam,

17. I know you have come here to deliberate seriously on the organization and management of the Islamic da'awah

movement for women. I am sure you will attain these objectives. But while you are here I would invite you to have a closer look at this country. As you look around you may see that although Malaysia has a large non-Muslim population, yet Islam is accepted as the religion of the country and Islamic activities are fully accepted and supported by non-Muslims. The harmony in this country has been beneficial to Islam. May you have a pleasant stay in this country and May Allah Subhanahu Wataala give you His blessings and guidance for a successful meeting here.

18. I wish once again to thank the RISEAP Women's Movement for the opportunity to address you this morning and I now have great pleasure in declaring this meeting open.

Wabillahi taufik walhidayah wassalamu' alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.
