

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
Venue : KUALA LUMPUR
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Title : WELCOMING REMARKS AT THE CONFERENCE "WHO SPEAKS FOR ISLAM? WHO SPEAKS FOR THE WEST?"

The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi,
Prime Minister of Malaysia

H.E. Mohammad Khatami
Former President of Iran

His Eminence Raisul Ulama
Mustafa Ceric
Grand Mufti of Bosnia Herzegovina

H.E. Dr. Mustapha Tlili
Fonder – Director
Dialogues: Islamic World US-The West,
New York University

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Asalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and a good morning.

It is an honour, ladies and gentlemen, for me to join such distinguished personalities from all over the globe this morning in your endeavour to deliberate on such a challenging topic of Who Speaks for Islam and Who Speaks for the West.

2. I am glad that the Prime Minister of Malaysia, The Honourable Abdullah Badawi, had tasked the IDFR to host and jointly organized this Conference with the Dialogues-IslamUS-The West, the Government of United Kingdom and France.

3. We are in an era of our history which requires us to stand together with a firm commitment to establish a culture of tolerance and harmony in order to better promote the well being of humankind notwithstanding our diversities. We see conflict and trouble ahead of us and it is thus our responsibilities before us to find the solutions to these problems. The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be come and the greater the dangers confronting us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. As the Foreign Minister of a predominantly Muslim nation, I cannot help but to pray that the fire that rages all over Europe and most of the Muslim world will not

find kindle wood here in Malaysia. In this difficult moment – God's test to us Muslims everywhere – nothing can be gleaned by violence and carnage. Of course as a Muslim myself, it is not easy to turn the other cheek when Islam is being attacked and vilified. But to understand the very essence of our religion in advocating peace and non-violence, we must, examine the ways in which we can move forward and look to a better future.

4. God in His infinite wisdom gave us the ability to think, and to evaluate, and above all to choose between right and wrong. This is the time when that gift should be used. Knowledge is only one step in that direction, but with understanding, it is the right step, and pursued through dialogue and discourse can we make that choice between the right and wrong thing to do. This Conference is not about converting people to our own way of thinking, whether Islam or otherwise. This Conference is to promote understanding of the Islam world, and in so doing, we hope that our fellow man will be able to understand why it is we feel so deeply about certain things – things that go to the core of what and who we are in the grand scheme of things.

5. The Islamic world is a civilization which has already reached its peak. This is not to say that it could not do so again – nothing is certain in this uncertain world of ours. In the days when the Islamic world was the beacon of light, there was no question of who would speak for Islam. But now, everyone wants to speak for Islam – those who have no standing in the eyes of their fellow Muslims, those who wish to change the Holy Quran, and those whose allegiance is to a selfish cause rather than to Allah, the Prophet, or Islam. These are the people with whom we have to be extra diligent in our dealings. And if we are deceived, what of those outside of the Islamic faith? Would they not be more easily deceived?

6. A Conference such as this has many prospects, not least because it is in part a society's initiative. Governments can only do so much. The rest is up to the will of the people, and there is no stronger will than that of civilian power vested in the hands of the knowledgeable, the learned, the strong of mind and of character.

7. Your deliberations at this Conference have the double responsibility of not only achieving understanding for the here and now, but also for the foreseeable future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. This Conference would not have been possible had it not been for the firm and staunch support of Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is himself a well-respected leader both in the Islamic world as well as on the international stage. I have often said that appearances can be deceiving, and to know the Prime Minister is to know that this is true. His calm and quiet demeanour cloaks a heart that feels more passionately about the correct perception of Islam than about any other subject in his vast repertoire.

9. Without further ado, allow me to call upon The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, to deliver his keynote address.