

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
Tajuk : THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON ISLAM AND ITS WORLD VIEW:
AMERICAN PERCEPTION
Lokasi : HOTEL PAN PACIFIC, KUALA LUMPUR
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I must, at the outset, thank the Malaysian-American Cultural and Educational Exchange (MACEE), for initiating to jointly organise a special seminar with the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia on Islam and Its World View: An American Perception, which I believe is very relevant and timely in view of the rapidly changing world order both in the diplomatic and economic fields. This initiative is very much welcomed by IKIM because it clearly reflects the confidence MACEE has in IKIM's capabilities, despite its infant stage, in organising the first seminar of this nature. I am also grateful to MACEE for arranging and supporting the visit of three American scholars in Islamic Studies to present their views on various aspects of Islam which I regard as a major contribution to this seminar.

I must also put on record my sincere gratitude to His Excellency the United States Ambassador to Malaysia, Mr.

John Wolf for his address just now. I wish to also thank the distinguished participants particularly the top American, Japanese and Korean executives residing in this country.

IKIM considers this kind of seminar very timely because the world is still pursuing its unending search for a just and stable world order. The end of the Cold War does not mean that there are no conflicts in other forms. We are witnessing various bloody events which had been taking place in some strategic parts of the world involving a large number of nations and international bodies.

Civilisation is a cultural entity which is characterised by both the common objective elements of language, history, religion, customs, traditions, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of the people. As such, civilisation is the highest and broadest cultural grouping with which people intensely identify themselves. By this definition, differences among civilisations are not only real but basic and fundamental.

The most important factor that differentiates between civilisations happen to be religion. This is due to the fact that people of different religions have differing views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries which will not easily disappear and hence are far more fundamental and lasting than differences among ideologies and regimes. Moreover, differences based on cultural characteristics are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones.

Communists can become capitalists, the rich can become poor, but Chinese cannot become Turks and Malays cannot become Indians. One can become half-Italian and half-Arab and even become simultaneously a citizen of two countries. But it is obviously not possible for someone to be half-Muslim and half-Christian.

Many people tend to return to their roots through religion, often in the form of movements that are labeled "fundamentalism". Such movements are found in Western Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as Islam.

Civilisations of developing countries are attempting to modernise and will continue to acquire the wealth, knowledge, technology, skills, machines and equipment that constitute modernity. At the same time they will attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional culture, traditions and values. The West will have to accommodate these non-Western modern civilisations whose values and interests are significantly different from those of the West. Some analysts predict that these "differences" will trigger conflicts in the future. The fault lines dividing civilisations can be very sharp and contrasting. In an effort to suppress if not eliminate such conflicts it is necessary to call for a more conscious effort on the part of all people from

different civilisations to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying civilisations and the ways people in those civilisations see their interests.

This is indeed necessary in order to identify elements of commonality so that we can all coexist in a peaceful world.

We have in this seminar specially selected The Islamic World View as the main theme for discussion because, the world view of Islam provides the underlying fundamental principles from which all aspects of the religion will emanate. Understanding the world view of Islam will provide you with the framework which defines not only the belief system but more importantly the manner in which the social, economic, political and cultural systems of Islam work. It should be noted that Islam is a peaceful religion. It is also to be noted that social injustice, the lack of economic, educational and other opportunities which give the extremists their constituency in each country. Those Muslim countries which seek to promote social justice and broaden the participation of their citizens in the management of their country's affairs, do not have the image of Islam which is negative.

The enacting of Islam as the religion of Malaysia has to take into account the practice of other faiths. Other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in Any part of the country. Religious freedom is guaranteed to all religions, Islam and other faiths, in that every person has the right to profess and practise his religion, and to propagate it, and that every religious group has the right to manage his own affairs, to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes, and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law. However, there is a limitation to the right of any person to propagate a religion if such propagation is made among persons professing the religion of Islam. Multinational companies including American companies have found the Muslim work force a quality, productive and disciplined work force, subjecting themselves to company rules and regulations. They work side by side with their non-Muslim co-workers in a peaceful manner. As a result of industrial peace and stability, no racial or religious extremism (which are our distinct comparative advantage) many multinational companies in Malaysia make much bigger profits from their operations here than in their locations in other parts of the world.

The Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia is currently preparing another important seminar towards the same objective. IKIM and Goethe Institute will be jointly organising a seminar from the 13 - 17 September, 1993 on The Role and Influence of Religions on Society. Goethe Institute will help arrange for four German Professors to present their views on the influence of Christianity on various aspects of society, while four Malaysian Muslim scholars will look at the same aspects of society from the Islamic perspectives. With this, I end my speech, I declare open this seminar.