

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
Tajuk : THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON ISLAMIC UNDERSTANDING FOR
THE MASS MEDIA
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Terlebih dahulu saya ucapkan terima kasih kepada Malaysian Press Institute yang telah bekerjasama dengan IKIM bagi menganjurkan seminar ini. Terima kasih jua saya ucapkan kepada para peserta sekalian yang sudi hadir.

Setakat ini, pihak media massa di negara ini telah memberi kerjasama yang erat kepada IKIM dalam usaha-usahanya untuk menyampaikan pendapat-pendapat yang dianggap betul mengenai agama Islam.

Despite the great contributions of Islam towards human civilization throughout the world as recorded in its illustrious history, Islam has unfortunately been grossly misrepresented especially by the media of certain countries, time and time again, as a religion for the backward, underdeveloped, aggressors etc. These adjectives are used to describe Islam and the Muslims of the contemporary world.

The main reason for such a tainted view is that Islam has been based on the behaviour of irresponsible Muslims. That such behaviour is taken to reflect the representative view of Islam and the Muslims is grossly incorrect. It may be true that there are some irresponsible Muslims, for that matter people of other faiths, whose behaviour may not be correct by any standards, but that should not be taken as reflective of the general body of Muslims and hence Islam.

Yet we find that the way Islam has been painted, especially by certain media, seems as though it can never represent any virtuous behaviour at all. On the contrary, Islam is made to appear so negative in every respect. The media should run stories of successful examples Muslims in life, their philosophy, their work ethics, and their principles which have contributed to their success. Then, and only then will Muslims and non-Muslims alike, will believe that Islam is a progressive religion. The people's (particularly the young) perception of religion is almost identical to the way it is portrayed by the media. Mass media content and images are subject to various levels of influence and control. It is clearly the product of the people who actually create it - authors, producers, script writers, and journalists.

This seminar has been arranged specially for those serving the mass media with the objectives of:

- (i) providing the necessary exposure to reporters and journalists regarding the worldview and values of Islam as a universal, positive, progressive and dynamic religion;
- (ii) minimising and if possible eliminating confusions about Islam; and
- (iii) informing and explaining the Islamic approach to reporting. We honestly feel that those in the mass media could play a significant role in portraying the truth in Islam by objective reporting. One cannot be completely objective when one does not understand the full picture of any situation. Worst still if the reporting is based on biased opinions or views.

The saying that "the pen is mightier than the sword" is very apt for those journalists serving the mass media.

Once a wrong interpretation of an event is carried by the mass media, the damage is already done, despite repeated apologies being tendered later. It is therefore necessary to be truthful, objective and factual, instead of making wrong interpretations, worst still interpolating or manipulating facts.

What I would like to emphasise here is the fact that the mass media can play a very important role of influencing public opinion. When an issue is brought up and allowed to be carried in the news for some time, the public will eventually succumb to the opinions portrayed by the media.

The mass media is undisputably a very powerful vehicle which can sway public opinions from one direction to another. The mass media can also be used to the advantage of society or be misused to the society's disadvantage. The people rely on the media for concepts, for images of their heroes, for guiding information, for emotional charges, for a recognition of public values, for symbols in general, even for language. Of all the institutions of daily life, the media specialise in everyday consciousness - by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralised symbolic capacity. To put it simply, the mass media have become the core system for the distribution of concepts, ideas and opinions.

Sekali lagi saya ucapkan terima kasih di atas penyertaan saudara-saudari sekalian dan adalah diharapkan kerjasama di antara IKIM dengan media mass akan berterusan.

Dengan ini saya adalah dengan sukacitanya merasmikan "Seminar on Islamic Understanding for the Mass Media.