

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
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It is a pleasure for me to address this conference on 'Islam and Tolerance' organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia.

2. Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and not a religion of war and compulsion. Tolerance towards the non Muslims has always been one of the fundamental teachings of Islam. In fact the Holy Quran and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet have specified the forms of tolerance to be practised by human beings on earth in their social, economic and political affairs.

3. Islam means peace, Peace can never be established without some form of tolerance. It can be in the form of tolerating differences of opinion. It can also be in the form of tolerating the existence of different religious faiths in a pluralistic society. Islam also stands for justice. Justice can never be established without tolerance. The history of human civilization attested to the fact that injustices, inhumane treatment towards others and genocides occurred as a result of not able to tolerate differences of opinion and a peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths. Islam therefore urges its followers to practise tolerance so that justice can prevail.

4. The Holy Quran mentions tolerance in the following manner: 'Let there be no compulsion in Religion: Truth stands out clear for Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God hath and knoweth all things' (Surah Al-Baqarah: Verse 256)' Here the Holy Quran prohibits the Muslims from forcing the non Muslims to accept Islam and they are required to be tolerant in their treatment towards them. In this verse, God emphasized that the Truth is clear and thus they are required to use their rational mind to decide for themselves without external pressures. What Islam stresses is a sincere and whole-hearted submission to God and not one which is a result of compulsion. In another verse, God mentions in the Holy Quran: 'O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do' (Surah Al-Ma'idah: Verse 8).

Here the Holy Quran made it obligatory upon the Muslims to apply the principle of justice towards the non Muslims even though they have ill-feelings towards them. Here, it is clear that even hatred should not be an obstacle for justice to be applied. Again some elements of tolerance are clearly visible in this verse.

5. The Holy Prophet had applied this principle of tolerance in many circumstances in the early days of Islam.

This tradition and obligation was then applied by his Companions in governing the early Islamic State. After the Battle of Khaybar, the Jewish scripture which were taken from the Jews were returned to them upon the order of the Holy Prophet. A Jewish scholar, Dr. Israel Welpenson, reviewing the conquest of Khaybar, refers to the magnanimous treatment of the Jews by the Holy Prophet in these words: 'The event shows what a high regard the Prophet had for their scriptures. His tolerant and considerate behaviour impressed the Jews who could never forget that the Prophet did nothing which trifled with their scared scriptures. The Jews knew how the Romans had, when they captured Jerusalem In 70 B.C. burnt their scriptures and trample them underfoot. The fanatic Christians persecuting the Jews of Spain had likewise consigned their scriptures to fire. This is the difference we find between these conquerors and Prophet of Islam'.

6. The Islamic vies of tolerance however does not apply to acts of injustice. Islam cannot be tolerant when a Muslim acts unjustly towards a non Muslim, or when a non Muslim acts unjustly towards a Muslim. Muslims are allowed to resist aggression and protect those Muslims and non Muslims who have been acted upon with injustice. The following werset is only a permission rather than a obligation to join in clash

of arms with the enemies. It is applied only when the pursuit of peace proves futile.

God says in the Holy Quran: 'Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and Allah is indeed Able to give them victory' (Surah Al- Hajj: Verse 39)'.

When the Holy Prophet arrived in Medina, he got a covenant made between the Ansar and Muhajirin to which the Jews were also made a party and guaranteed protection of life and property as well as freedom of professing their faith. They were equal under the law and have certain rights and obligations. It was in this covenant that tolerance was first legally sanctioned. The Muslims and non Muslims were protected and they cooperated in defending the state from external aggression.

7. In modern times, man has learned to split the atom and build planes that conquer space and distance and bring people the world over within hours and minutes of each other, yet man has not been able to find a formula that enable men of different races, cultures, personalities and religions to live together amicably. However, Malaysia is a model of religious tolerance to the world. The fact that this Seminar is held today is a testimony to this. So with these words, I have great pleasure in officiating this Seminar.