Inter-religious Dialogue in Malaysia: Past Experience, Present Scenario and Future Challenges

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Abstract

Inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia has taken place more than a century ago either in the form of 'dialogue of life' or in the form of intellectual discourse. 'Dialogue of life' normally occurs in a superficial ways of interaction such as 'open house' during festive seasons and daily interaction in market places, offices or schools while dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse occurs in official events such as forum, seminar and public lecture. Earliest endeavours of inter-religious dialogue were championed by non-Muslim organizations with the aim to protect their rights that was allegedly threatened with the execution of Islamization policy in 1980s. The involvement of Muslim's organizations could only be seen until 1990s with a pioneering attempt by Center for Civilizational Dialogue (University of Malaya) in 1995 that aimed to generate greater inter-religious understanding. The implementation of inter-religious dialogue in the form of intellectual discourse however is still limited due to its nature which is apparently more appealing to the intellectuals' community. On top of that, inter-religious dialogue also facing constant objections by some critics due to misunderstanding of the actual goals of inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, correct understanding about the concept of inter-religious dialogue must be nurtured among the masses prior to commencing any inter-religious dialogue program.

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