

# Intellectual Discourse

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Volume 26

Number 2

2018



**International Islamic University Malaysia**  
<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>



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## ***Conference Report***

### **International Conference on Religion, Culture and Governance in the Contemporary World (ICRCG2018), 3-4 October 2018 (Wednesday-Thursday), 23-24 Muharram 1440.**

The contemporary world is passing through a very crucial time. According to UN reports, the world is facing its ‘worst humanitarian crisis’ since the end of World War II, with more than 20 million people facing starvation and famine in four countries. (AFP). Different regions of the world are marred by wars and conflicts. Unfortunately, attempts to end those so far have come to naught. As a consequence of these wars and conflicts ordinary people continue to suffer from hunger, and diseases. They continue to be victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Despite all efforts to stymie poverty, social, economic and gender inequalities, religious conflicts and extremism of all kinds, these continue to increase at an alarming pace. As if these were not enough, people have to deal with the negative impacts of rapid climate change in terms of increased number of floods, wild fires, and global warming.

Given the prevailing conditions in the world, it was timely that the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) organised an international conference titled “International Conference on Religion, Culture and Governance in the Contemporary World (ICRCG2018)” at IIUM’s picturesque Gombak campus. It was a privilege for the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) to organise the conference on behalf of the IIUM.

In the age of unprecedented technological advancement and information revolution, it would be devastating for humanity without ethics and divine guidance. This point is well emphasized by Professor Tan Sri Dato’ Dzulkipli Abdul Razak, the Honourable Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia. In a message to the conference he pointed out “with the coming into second decade of

the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the promise of great advancement in knowledge, and economic and technological development is high on everyone's mind. When pursuing these in zeal, the possibility of overlooking the potential and tangible negative side effects are very high, specifically when ethics does not play its role. This may result in detrimental consequences such as intensifying conflicts between societies, poverty and threats to environment". The Honourable Rector further pointed out that "the answers to the challenges facing us, politically, socially, ethically and spiritually, today are reached through the combination of the Divine revelation and a scientific worldview."

In another message Professor Dr. Mohammad A. Quayum, Dean, KIRKHS, IIUM, demonstrated the inclusiveness and uniqueness of the conference, as he put, "it is inclusive and encyclopaedic in that it harnesses and integrates themes associated with religion, with those related to culture and good governance." One of the main aim and objective of the conference, as Assoc. Professor S M Abdul Quddus, the conference Convenor, pointed out in his message "a refocused attention on the philosophy of 'development' and 'modernization' in light of the role of religion, culture and value-laden governance system and their impact on human life and society, politics, administration and governance in the globalized and technology driven world can no longer be ignored." He also hoped that the conference would provide a comprehensive insight for the future sustainable development in our societies.

The conference was attended by paper presenters and participants from Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Iraq, the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Sri Lanka, Turkey and international scholars from Algeria, Myanmar, Nigeria and Tunisia, Tanzania, Sudan based at IIUM. A total of 175 papers, which included 40 in Arabic language were presented in 20 clusters (parallel sessions with 10 venues) spread over two days (October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>).

The keynote speeches were given by three distinguished scholars respectively Her Excellency Dr. Merve Safa Kavakci, Ambassador of Turkey to Malaysia. She provided an impressive speech on "Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Turkey." She highlighted the role of Turkey in solving Middle East, especially the Syrian crisis and the case of millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Dr



Kavakci's following comment struck a chord among the participants: "We do not treat Syrian people as 'refugees' rather as guests of Turkey." Dr. Kavakci, as a former lecturer in international relations, presented her paper quite academically and demonstrated how Turkey is shifting from block influenced foreign policy to independent humanitarian foreign policy.

Emeritus Professor Muhammad Haji Salleh, the most renowned literary writer in Malaysia delivered his speech on "A Place for Literature in a New World." Professor Salleh quite dispassionately analysed the current world order and the status of literature in the world. He emphatically demonstrated the importance and necessity of literature in the age of technology and artificial intelligence. Mohamad Abdalla, Professor at University of South Australia, another resource person talked on "Being an Australian Muslim: Challenges and Opportunities." He was very articulate while presenting the current situation of Australian Muslims and their challenges within the community. Professor Abdalla pointed out that the biggest challenge of Australian Muslims is the lack of 'competent Islamic scholars' with the contextual understanding of Islam. He also further illustrated that having Muslims from different regions and schools of thought, the Australian Muslims often had to encounter diverse practices and legal opinions. Despite some internal challenges, including Islamophobia, Professor Abdalla in his speech explained how the number of Australian Muslims had increased over the year. Islam is now the fastest growing religion in Australia and the second largest faith community.

The papers of conference were categorized under fourteen sub-themes, for example, from Economic Development, Modernization and Development agencies, Religion and Science, Philosophy, Ethics, Religion and spirituality to Politics, Political institutions, Law, Rule of Law and Human Rights, and so on. The issues of Governance, Public Policy, Geopolitics, Religion, Culture, Social dynamics and Islamophobia were covered by significant number of papers at the conference.

The discussions made at the conference were academic, scholarly and festive in nature. The conference was incorporated with Kulliyah Celebration Day. The conference organisers collaborated with two well-known institutions, International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and

Islamic University Maldives (IUM). It is hoped that the proceedings of the conference would be published as soon as possible. At the end of the conference, certificates and token of appreciations ceremony were held with the presence of YB. Dr. Maszlee Malik, Honourable Education Minister of Malaysia and President of IIUM. The conference officially was ended by reciting prayer and serving Hi-Tea.

**Atiqur Rahman Mujahid**



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ISSN 0128-4878 (Print)

ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

