

## **Standing together for refugees everywhere**

Published in: New Straits Times, Friday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2018

By Wan Naim Wan Mansor

Source : <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/03/350970/standing-together-refugees-everywhere>

Violence in war-torn countries continues to displace large groups of people, forcing them to seek refuge elsewhere. The resulting refugee crisis, which has reached unprecedented levels, according to the United Nations, is as much a humanitarian catastrophe as it is a moral one. The erosion of universal values such as compassion, love, and kindness, is not only responsible for the bloodshed and persecution which led to the initial displacement, but also affects our attitude in accommodating the refugees.

Latest UN statistics show a staggering 65.6 million people displaced from their countries, with an average of 20 people forced to leave their homes every single minute. This figure includes the 22.5 million refugees and 10 million stateless people who are denied fundamental human rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. Children, unfortunately, make up 51 per cent of the world's refugees. The most severely affected countries include Syria, Yemen, Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan, Burundi, Iraq, and Myanmar.

Against this backdrop, the Kuala Lumpur Interfaith Declaration on Global Refugee Crisis was launched earlier this month (March 3) at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia.

The declaration was part of the "Interfaith Refugee Day" organised by IAIS Malaysia in conjunction with UN's World Interfaith Harmony Week. The theme was "Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour". The declaration featured 20 institutional signatories representing the major religious groups and communities of Malaysia.

Focusing on religion and universal values, multi-faith panellists shared their views in a forum entitled, "Religious Contributions in Peace-Making Process: Calling for Justice, Love, Compassion and Mercy".

Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali, (IAIS founding CEO), in his opening remark, recalled several key lessons from the historic Emigration (hijra) of the Prophet from Makkah to Ethiopia and then to Madinah during which the Helpers (Ansar) accommodated the Migrants (Muhajirun), treated them as their own brethren and provided them with unrivalled social and economic assistance.

Muslims are also reminded of the Quranic verse (Al-Baqarah 2:177) which associates righteousness with helping the needy, and a Hadith tying true belief (iman) with selflessness and loving "... for his brother what he loves for himself".

S. S. Datuk Abdul Halim (Melaka Mufti) elaborated how the Prophet was sent as a "mercy to the worlds" and thus, he encouraged Muslims to promote harmony and peace. Allah gives special preference to the prayers of the oppressed, regardless of their religious affiliations.

The Quran (Al-Maidah, 5:32) proclaims that killing a soul without just cause is tantamount to killing all of humankind; while saving one is tantamount to saving the entire humankind. It is, thus, a moral prerogative to overcome oppressors from afflicting further harm.

N. J. Singham (National Religious Bureau of Malaysia Hindu Sangam vice-chairman) said that Hinduism promotes the concepts of love, tolerance, understanding and acceptance, and stated

that only the ignorant and unenlightened would detach love from divinity. He also shared several valuable lessons extracted from the Mahabharata — to observe peace, even in the course of war; stop fighting by sunset; if the enemy surrenders, protect him and give him asylum; and practise dharma (righteousness) by doing the right things in the right way.

Jason Leong (NextGen Christians of Malaysia [ANCOM] founder and adviser) also associated kindness with belief, quoting Jesus Christ: “If you’ve shown kindness to human beings, you’ve shown kindness to me.”

Religion can contribute towards equanimity in difficult situations in at least five ways by: enshrining a set of positive values; re-humanising “dehumanised” situations; mobilising communities; invoking a sense of calling to ignite the spirit of perseverance; and, incorporating spiritual dimensions into peace-making processes.

Datuk K. Sri Dhammaratana Nayake Maha Tera (Buddhist High Chief Priest of Malaysia), in his speech, upheld the values of respect, love, and kindness in reclaiming peace and justice in conflict zones. The Buddhist notion of suffering (dukkha) and the five principles of Buddhism (Pancha-Sila) are essential guidelines to promote good conduct and to discourage misconducts.

Dr Jasbir Singh (president of Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia) quoted one of Guru Nanak’s teachings, which is to value three things: honesty, good deeds and sharing earnings with all. These would remedy the existential crisis of having no sense of direction and purpose, which is the source of all evil. To solve worldly problems, one must first face the illusory war that blocks one’s path to God.

Other signatories to the declaration include Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim (the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur), Richard Towle (Head of UNHCR Malaysia), and 12 others ranging from university professors, professionals, NGO representatives, activists and religious groups’ representatives.

The KL Declaration put forth six recommendations:

PROMOTE universal spiritual and moral values;

ADDRESS the immediate needs of refugees;

SPEAK UP against religious abuse;

PRESENT counter-narratives against extremism;

ENCOURAGE interfaith engagement and cooperation; and,

PERSUADE policymakers through advice, diplomacy and negotiations.

---

Wan Naim Wan Mansor, is an analyst at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia. [wannaim@iais.org.my](mailto:wannaim@iais.org.my)