

International Conference on Moderation
Moderation- an Islamic Approach to Face the Global Transition on ASEAN- Thailand

Keynote Address

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Assalammu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,
& A very good morning,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Allow me at the very onset, to state my appreciation on being invited to deliver an address at this very august meeting of scholars, pertaining to **Moderation - an Islamic Approach to Face the Global Transition on ASEAN.**

2. Such a topic is much timely, for today, we live in a world full of contradictions. On the one hand, with growing material wealth and advances in science and technology, human civilisation has developed, dare I say, as never before.

3. On the other hand, frequent regional conflicts, global challenges like terrorism, human refugees and trafficking, as well as poverty, unemployment and the ever-widening income gap have all added to the rising uncertainties of the world. So much so, what started as economic and political crises, have somehow become religious conflicts.

4. This has led to many feeling a sense of bewilderment and if I may, led to chaos at certain points, as people wonder: What has gone wrong, or where did we go wrong with the world?
One thing has led to another, and this chain reaction of events has seen to the rise in extreme protectionism policies as well as creating a sentiment of *false populism*.

5. The divisions upon Brexit has been succeeded by the chaotic scenes in the United States, while there represents too, within Europe, a rise for the policies and sentiments by Geert Wilders and Marine Le Penn in their respective nations.

6. ASEAN too, is not exempted in this matter. For a region that celebrates its diversity - in possessing a significant number of Buddhists, Muslims and Christians, whom have able to live side-by-side - inter-communal and inter-religious issues have risen. Olden and yet to resolve issues have led to newer and more complicated ones.

7. In short, we seem to have come back to what the English writer, Charles Dickens had so famously uttered, - "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

8. It is in our view, that these inter-religious issues, more so in the context of today's topic, have arisen due to the hijacking of Muslim terminologies.

9. That which has so long been feared by erstwhile learned scholars of Islam, namely the confusion and corruption of knowledge, as propagated between two sets of extremism visibly seen today.

10. One is the hard-line terror as espoused by Da'esh, Jabhat al-Nusra and its ilk, which ultimately leads to the unfair coinage of the term "Islamic terrorist". A terrorist, whatever its propensity - be it Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Christian - should always be identified and condemned as a terrorist - and never by his or her religious affiliation.

11. At the other end of the spectrum, there are sects of people who seek to define and promote Islam and its terminologies according to their own whims and desires, forgoing the true and correct disciplines of Islamic knowledge.

12. These two sets of extremes has also given birth to the clash of confusion, between Arabisation and Islamisation. There need be a differentiation between the two, in order for peaceful coexistence to take place.

13. Or in the context of ASEAN, for it to regain its place amidst the current climate.

14. Essentially, amidst all these challenges, there is the discernible need and desire - of which I'm sure most present here today will agree - for us to bequeath our future generation a sea of tranquillity, instead of passing on an ocean of stormy currents and muddied waters. And for this to happen, moderation is the way to go.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

16. The Conundrum to these confusions vis-à-vis challenges has always been prescribed to within man's history. The Quran has long foretold of the excesses, of civilisations' past, in their deeds and spirits, and the woe befalling them.

17. Thus, in the bid for peace and prosperity, the rise of living conditions and pinnacles of progress must always be tempered with the spirit of humanism and education.

18. This serves to provide proper equilibrium, less we corrupt ourselves and others, thereby forcing one's civilisational inevitable destructions.

19. Civilisations of the past, at its very peak has always concentrated on knowledge. And the advancement of moderation encapsulates knowledge. Moderation cannot suffice without knowledge.

20. I have oft-talked and promoted, on the concept or the reclaiming, of the *La Convivencia* spirit, the celebration of knowledge, culture and traditions between the Muslims, Christians and Jews of Andalusian Spain. The practices of peaceful coexistence were much visible. The intertwining of cultures, knowledge and humanity was prevalent. So much so, it practiced and lived upon the word of peace - to you your religion, and to me mine.

21. This is what Islamic moderation or *al-Wasatiyyah* aspires, explicating upon the idea of a middle nation, a community of people - throughout the history of mankind - whom are just, and are considered the best of people.

22. The practice renders placing things in its rightful place, of taking the middle path between two extremes in the best of manner and full of justice, and to not transgress, as per the prescriptions of Islam. Thus, in order to stay upon the path of *wasatiyyah*, acting as the *ummatan wasatha* would inevitably require one to be knowledgeable - and in continuous pursuit of excellence – to enable them to distinguish between fallacy and fact, being just (*al-adl*) and acting in moderation (*wasat*), thus combatting the various forms of extremism (*al-ghuluw*) and discrimination.

23. This would resonate with the Quranic injunction of “*Thus we have made you a community justly balanced that you might be witnesses over the people and the Messenger a witness over yourselves...*” of being witnesses to truth for *ummatan wasatha* is conditional upon the *ummah*'s commitment to moderation and the truth, for the testimonies of extremists and transgressors are ever deemed inadmissible.

24. Thus, it is high-time that ASEAN seeks to recreate its own *La Convivencia* – the ASEAN Way.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

25. It is in this very sense, that I find the organisation of this Conference as most pertinent. In an era of confusion which has led to rising intolerances, there is the need for moderation to prevail. This can only come by the learned men and women of the present time.

26. We need more bridges – civilisational bridges – to be constructed, for the people to cross it. And to build these bridges, there must be true and proper direction; a guidance.

27. Thus, it is the duty of the scholars, of the educated amongst the people of present, to not only build these bridges but to guide the masses onto the right sense of directions.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

28. The Global Movement of Moderates signifies one such civilisational bridge, towards peaceful coexistence between the people and faiths of the world.

29. Throughout our existence, especially of more recent times - since its endorsement as an ASEAN initiative - we have striven to advocate moderation at national, regional and international levels.

30. Our endeavours have led to our closer bonds of cooperation with this nation's own *Wasatiyyah Institute for Peace & Development*, as well as the Philippines' *Bishop-Ulama Conference*, just to name a few.

31. These efforts, or institutions, are most exemplary in its aims and objectives, for it realises that the path of moderation is not an option, rather, it is a prerequisite in attaining peace and prosperity.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

32. In recognition of all that has been said, I am pleased to announce to all present today, that the Global Movement of Moderates, seeks to launch its latest endeavour – **the Alliance of Researchers on Moderation!**

33. However, this endeavour requires the participation and engagement of scholars who yearn for peace and progress to take place. In short, this initiative of ours, needs you, your engagement – the participation of scholars and the ever-willing array of volunteers who wish to play a part towards peaceful coexistence.

34. It is my sincere and fervent hope that the Conference held today, and with the MoU signed between GMMF and the Institute of Asian Studies, Scholars for Peace; it will be the start of a successful bridging of civilisations, based upon knowledge and moderation towards peace, progress and prosperity.

35. Thank you.