

Stifling “The Amman Message”: Threat to Bomb Islamic Studies Venue in Kuala Lumpur

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In any civilised society no one will resort to violence, or the threat of violence, to stifle the voices that one does not want to hear. Unfortunately, this is what happened in Malaysia a few days ago when some bigots managed to force the cancellation of a public seminar on ‘The Amman Message’ organised by certain civil society groups scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur on the 13th of July 2019. A Facebook Account holder threatened to bomb the venue of the seminar, the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS).

Threatening to bomb a place constitutes an act of terror. While there have been instances in the past when force has been employed by groups to disrupt peaceful public gatherings, this is perhaps one of those rare occasions where an individual blatantly links himself and the group he is representing, *Gerakan Banteras Syiah* (the movement to stop the spread of Syiah) to a terrorist threat. It suggests a degree of boldness which we have not witnessed before.

What is shocking about this brazen act is that it is driven by a stark lie. It projects the Amman Message as a devious instrument to propagate Syiah teachings when anyone who has a basic understanding of the Message knows that it merely recognises the validity of all 8 *Mathhabs* (legal schools) of Islam and forbids *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims. Aimed at creating unity and harmony within the Muslim *Ummah*, the message was initiated by a Sunni Ruler, King Abdullah of Jordan in 2004. The majority of those involved in drafting and endorsing the document were Sunnis. Besides, the Amman Message was unanimously adopted by the summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now Cooperation) in Mecca in December 2005. It is undoubtedly true that the Amman Message is one of the most important documents produced by the Muslim world in the last 100 years.

Manufacturing a lie in order to tarnish a noble effort and then deploying that lie to whip up popular emotions is becoming quite pervasive in our society. Of course, the manipulation of the lie is so much a part of politics in Malaysia and most other countries. Nonetheless, in a situation in which fears are exaggerated and uncertainties are exploited even more than in the past, the lie becomes even more impactful — and therefore more dangerous.

It is a pity that so few Malaysians including human rights advocates are prepared to expose the lies that are churned out. Even the threat of violence to silence the truth has not elicited as much condemnation from sane and rational people as it should. When the people are not doing enough, it becomes imperative for those in authority to act with courage and firmness.

In the case of the aborted Amman Message seminar since names and identities are known it

is assumed that the police have not encountered insurmountable difficulties in their investigation. As one of the three organisers of the seminar, the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) would like to know what action has been taken against the individual and group that threatened to bomb the venue. The public has a right to know.

It is only when prompt and effective action is taken against those who threaten peace and peaceful dialogue that we will be convinced that the rule of law is supreme in our society and that we uphold civilised norms of human behaviour.

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