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PRESS RELEASE

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**10th International Conference
5th-6th September 2023, Kuala Lumpur**

“Peace & Prosperity in Muslim Majority Countries & Beyond”

The 10th International Liberty and Network conference in Kuala Lumpur is held in partnership with its local partners, EMIR Research and the Institute for Leadership and Development Studies (LEAD), sponsored by Atlas Network, Network for A Free Society and Amanie. The sessions discussed in the conference today included on democracy and civil society, economic prosperity and gender equality in context of “Peace & Prosperity in Muslim Majority Countries & Beyond”.

The welcoming remarks was presented by Mr. Amin Ahmad, a former Malaysian Parliament Member and ILN Advisory Board member who highlighted the global need to restore political peace and prosperity. He pointed out several critical issues, including the paradox of rich resources alongside poverty and homelessness, the rise of extremism, corruption, and political instability. Also, Lord Syed Kamall, a member of UK House of Lords and the co-founder of ILN, delivered the inaugural speech, addressing the pressing issue of terrorism carried out by extremists in the name of Islam. He also mentioned neo-conservative ideologies and the perceived contradiction between Islam and a free society.

Mr. Ali Salman, the CEO of ILN provided an overview of milestones, programmes and projects of ILN over the last 12 years. He highlighted the concept of a free society and contrasted it with the manifestations of an unfree society while advancing a case for compatibility of Islam and free society resulting into policies for economic, religious and political freedoms.

The keynote speech was delivered by Dato' Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry bin Abdul Kadir, emphasising fostering universal values, using modern technology for societal betterment, ranging from the challenges faced by Muslim-majority countries to the geopolitics of the Middle East and the rise of populism. His speech underscored the importance of diplomacy, solidarity, and the promotion of universal values in achieving peace, prosperity, and a more inclusive world, including the normalization of relations between Middle Eastern countries and the importance of cooperation. The geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, and the emergence of a potential multipolar world.



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Session 1: Democracy & Civil Society

The list of panels in this session highlighted various challenges faced by the majority of Muslim countries as well as Muslim communities, highlighting the decline in democracy and the rise in illiberalism in the contemporary world. This session delved into the complex issues surrounding democracy, particularly in the context of Tunisia, Turkey, and the broader Muslim-majority world.

Key takeaways from this session include the need for redistributing power among the elites and addressing the polarisation, plurality, and ideological divisions within the society in the context of Tunisia. Panellists also highlighted the importance of independent judiciary system in safeguarding democracy. Furthermore, it was also highlighted by the panellists that democracy is being challenged by illiberalism. The session highlighted the need for a deeper understanding and the contextualization of democracy, especially in Muslim-majority countries. The failure of Islam in certain contexts and the capture of state institutions by vested interests were explored as challenges.

A few questions that were highlighted were whether there is a mechanism within Islam to counter illiberalism and how the Muslim communities can save democracy. In summary, the session underscored the need for political, economic, educational, judicial, and media reforms to bridge the gap between theoretical ideals and practical governance and to promote democracy while respecting cultural contexts.

Session 2: Economic Prosperity

The next enlightening session delved into the multifaceted journey towards economic prosperity in Muslim-majority countries. In this session, the panellists engaged in comprehensive discussions on various challenges and opportunities to achieve economic prosperity in these countries. One of the paramount challenges highlighted was how the cultural and political obstacles such as anti-liberal sentiments can hinder the reform efforts. Additionally, it was emphasised that a significant obstacle for progress lies in the limited economic freedom experienced by Muslim-majority countries, characterised by government intervention and instability.

Moreover, the disruptive aftermath of the Arab spring was examined, revealing its profound impact on economic stability. Notably, the session also shed light on Singapore's remarkable economic freedom that have been impacting its neighbouring countries, including Malaysia. Another pressing issue highlighted was Tunisia's dire economic crisis with high public debt. In essence, the path of prosperity for these nations requires comprehensive reforms, political stability, and the cultivation of economic freedom. These elements will form a bedrock upon lasting prosperity to be built for Muslim-majority nation.

Session 3: Gender Equity

The last session for today encompassed the discourse of equity and women's rights, women and economic prosperity, women in the public sphere and the personal freedom and dress code of women, particularly in Iran.



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This session highlighted the evolving role of Muslim women's voices in the public sphere and the potential for personal freedom to be influenced by cultural, historical and religious factors. A noteworthy highlight discussion centred around the hijab controversy back in 2022 in India, which served as a symbol of resistance and highlighted the importance of amplifying the voices of Muslim women.

Furthermore, the session also underscored the significant need to locate and elevate the voices of Muslim women. Additionally, the discussion illuminated the broader societal context, with legislative focus emphasising the ongoing relevance of promoting equity and women's rights.

Further discussions were also made on the economic cost of gender inequity with presentation on correlation between female labour force participation and economic growth/development - figures were shown on varying labour force participation rates across nations with different incomes. Driving factors as well as limitations associated with female labour force participation were also discussed in details.

Cultural and personal freedom of Iranian women have been a long-standing issue that is often at the forefront. Dress code restrictions have been a contentious issue, with legal codes in administrative and penal laws mandating veiling. The need for the government for reforms in this regard was stressed as it is not solely a religious matter but also an influence from social and cultural practices.

In summary, it was a fruitful and engaging session and participants are looking forward for more interactive and interesting discussions on day two (2) of the conference.