HUMAN RELATIONS IN MULTI CULTURAL SOCIETIES - GLOBAL ETHICS AND OUR COMMON FUTURE

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Introduction

The term 'global' has been in use in the English language for over 400 years. However 'globalization' and related words like 'globalizing' and 'globalize', appear to have first come into use in the 1960s, mostly in economic contexts (Featherstone, 2000). Today, not many people have not heard of the term that is loaded with assumptions of the world becoming a single, united and homogeneous entity, thus the emergence of phrases like 'global village' and 'global community'.

What is Globalization?

To understand globalization, we must first understand that it is a continuous process and not a static condition. This means that globalization is a series of gradual actions that breaks down geopolitical boundaries and turns the world into a single global unit. Walker and Fox (1996) equated globalization with "*the end of geography*". It must be remembered that globalization is both cause and effect of the information revolution which is driven by "*dramatic improvements in telecommunications, exponential increases in computer power coupled with lower costs, and the development of electronic communications and information networks such as the Internet*". (OECD, 1997)

Globalization can be defined differently from various perspectives. Mazrui (2000) outlined three different distinct meanings to globalization. He noted that "*at one level it (globalization) consists of processes that lead to global interdependence and the increasing rapidity of exchange across vast distances*". The three definitions given by Mazrui are as follows:

i)   From the perspective of information, globalization is made up of "*forces which are transforming the information pattern of the world and creating the beginnings of what has been called the information super highway*".

ii)   From the economic standpoint, globalization is the transformation of "*the global market...creating new economic interdependencies across vast distances*".

iii)   A more comprehensive definition of globalization is "*all forces which are turning the world into a global village, compressing distance, homogenising culture, accelerating mobility and reducing the relevance of political leaders*".

The third definition is much more comprehensive in nature, spelling out the "properties" of globalization. This definition is very much in line with the definition given by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1997) which states that "*globalization is not a single phenomenon...(but) a range of trends and forces changing the face of the world in which we live*".

A Brief History of Globalization
Throughout history, mankind has experienced three major revolutions namely the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution and the information revolution. There are both common features and distinctive characteristics of these three revolutions.

A distinct common feature is that the degree and the nature of the impacts generated by these changes have been uneven among different groups of the human population. On the other hand, certain groups of people have benefited from the changes and improved the quality of their lives, while there have been some others exploited by these revolutions.

Therefore, in the history of any societal change, there is a deep visible or invisible division among different classes, ethnicities, professions, cultures and nations. A certain new idea, principle, procedure and machinery welcomed by a segment of population could be vehemently rejected by another. Classical examples are capitalism, communism, market mechanism and democracy. Even in developed countries like the United State of America, people are also split on issues such as taxation, alcohol, marijuana and abortion.

The Information Revolution
There are several distinctive, somewhat unique characteristics of the information revolution. The information revolution is faceless, paperless and speedy. These characteristics make our society more vulnerable to criminal activities and violations of ethical and cultural norms. For example, one may argue that because users of internet are faceless, it is easier for criminals to engage in illegal activities and it is more difficult for the law to fight against them. These characteristics (faceless, paperless, speedy) in actuality, are the characteristics of the current nature of globalization.

Ethics
As for ethics, Bertrand Russell elegantly describes it as 'in origin the art of recommending to others the sacrifices required for cooperation with oneself'. The literature is filled with the various classifications of ethical theories. For example, they can be classified as, one, principle-based theories (normative ethics), and two, virtue-based theories (Beach, 1996). Principle-based theories are of either the deontological or consequential (utilitarianism) types. The former relates to the theory of obligation or duties, or rules and rights, while the latter links the rightness of an act with the goodness of the state of affairs it brings about. Virtue-based theories include one, communitarianism that applies an Aristotelian approach where practical wisdom is employed in the reasoning process, and the focus is on uniqueness of each ethical situation and based on shared community values or closed societies in which there are collective values shared by all, and two, relationalism that emphasizes the values of love, family and friendship inherent to the situation at hand.

If the above is true of ethics in contemporary philosophical thought, what about the role of ethics in religious teaching? According to Beach (1996) three ethical imperatives are embedded in the Judeo-Christian ethics through the 10 Commandments, that is: one, human welfare and beneficence which relates to the idea of helping others, protecting them from harm, healing their illnesses, or saving their lives, and the duty to promote good, prevent harm or non-maleficence and use the maximization of human happiness for the greatest number of individuals as the criterion for right action; two, human justice which requires one to set fairness for all above benefit for some as well as fairness in implementing the law; and three, human dignity and autonomy which relates to the idea of respect for persons, including

their rights to choice, freedom and privacy and protection of those with diminished autonomy. These emphases are also relevant to the teaching of Islam.

The advent of globalization in the 1960s somewhat marked the beginning of earnest efforts by world bodies like the United Nations to create international systems and structures that would address the urgent needs of the emerging nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The assumption was that such efforts would be able to narrow the gap between the prosperous West or North and the poorer East or South. The expectations have all but dimmed due to the fact that all the so-called development plans of the last 40 years or so have been largely insignificant in bringing together these rather contrasting societies, economically speaking.

As a result of this, problems of the world are aplenty today – poverty and starvation, consumerism and population growth, debt burdens and trade imbalances, crimes, AIDS, drugs, war and refugees. The assortment of mega problems is so new that we did not have a name for it until 1970 when the late Dr. Aurelio Peccei, described it and named it the 'global problematique'. Hence, the idea of 'global ethics' has been put forth as the strategy that can help bring some sense into the world.

It is true that while the world's religious and spiritual traditions differ quite significantly with regard to various beliefs and practices, they nevertheless hold in common certain ethical principles.

Towards a Global Ethics
In a document titled *Towards a Global Ethic*: An initial Document prepared by the 200 respected and influential from the world's spiritual communities who attended the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, the following four vital commitments have been proposed (Barney, 2000) :

- Commitment to a Culture of non-Violence and Respect for Life.

"All people have a right to life, safety, and the free development of personality insofar as they do not injure the rights of others. No one has the right to torture, injure, must less kill any other human being. And no people, no state, no race, no religion has the right to hate, to discriminate against, to 'cleanse', to exile, much less to liquidate a 'foreign' minority which is different in behaviour or holds different beliefs."

- Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order.

"We must utilize economics and political power for service to humanity instead of misusing it in ruthless battles for domination. We must develop a spirit of compassion with those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely."

- Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness.

"We must cultivate truthfulness in all our relationships instead of dishonesty, dissembling, and opportunism…. We must courageously serve the truth and we must remain constant and trustworthy, instead of yielding to opportunistic accommodation to life."

- Commitment to a Culture of Partnership Between Men and Women

"The relationship between men and women should be characterized not by patronizing behaviour or exploitation, but by love, partnership and trustworthiness."

Islam and Globalization

Islam relates to the fact that mankind has been created into many different races scattered all around the globe. From the verse, it can be argued that Islam encourages people of different races and nationalities to interact with one another. In the past, interaction has been limited and slow, but with the information revolution, this process has sped up at a great pace.

On another note, it has been stated in verse 107 of *Surah Al-Anbiya'* that "*We sent thee not but as a mercy for all creatures"*. This verse refers to the Prophet Muhammad who was appointed by God Almighty to spread the word of Islam to the whole of mankind. This task is global in nature. The Prophet undertook his duties first by disseminating the teaching of Islam to his closest family members, relatives and companions. Then he focused on the people of the city of Makkah, before spreading Islam to the people of Hijaz (present day Saudi Arabia). Later, when the Prophet established the first Islamic administration in Madinah, he sent out letters to other rulers in other parts of the world, such as Rome, Persia and Ethiopia to diffuse his message of Islam.

The nature of spreading the message of Islam is global. Even after the Prophet's passing, this task was taken over by the Muslims. Muslim traders who travelled all around the world succeeded in spreading Islam to other parts of the globe. As such, we now find Muslim communities existing in almost all parts of the world. This is simply because Islam is not founded on the notion of race, locality, nationality, political ideology or class. Rather, Islam is based purely and simply on the belief in and submission to Allah, the Almighty Creator as well as belief in His Apostles and His Book. Again, it is interesting to note that this is global in character.

It is fascinating to observe that Muslims all over the world pray five times a day facing one direction that is the Kaabah in Makkah. Equally interesting is the fact that all Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan every year. Even more amazing is the congregation of Muslim pilgrims from the four corners of the world to the holy city of Makkah to perform the *hajj* at the same time.

All these rituals – daily prayers, fasting, and pilgrimage to Makkah – are evidently the result of globalization, wherein the Muslims of yesteryears had succeeded in spreading the teaching of Islam to other parts of the world – past, present and future – pray, fast and perform *hajj* following the same global "standard" (Musa and Saifuddeen, 2000). This shows that Islam is a global religion suitable for all people at all times in all places.

As such, Islam and globalization are not alien to one another. The concept of globalization has existed hand in hand with Islam and the Muslims from very beginning.

Impacts of Globalization:

During the Tenth General Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs between 2 and 5 July 1998, several recommendations were made with regards to the Islamic response to globalization. The recommendations were made up of three sections, namely:

1) Islamic response at the political level to issues pertaining to globalization
2) Islamic response at the economic level to issues pertaining to globalization
3) Islamic response to issues pertaining to globalization in scientific areas

Nonetheless, while serious thought has been given and recommendations have been made vis-à-vis globalization issues, there must equally be concrete and practical plans to realize all those recommendations. Putting ink to paper is easy, but to translate what is written into practical and realistic actions requires a lot more effort and initiative.

The challenge for Muslims – be they Muslim countries, organizations or individuals – lies not only in identifying the problems and issues of globalization. Mere rhetoric is insufficient. But the real challenge for Muslims in this era of globalization is to face these issues head on with concrete measures that are implementable.

Global Muslim Unity
When reflecting on the future of the human community, the critical issues facing the world today present an acute ethical challenge to the human society. We believe that what is urgently needed is a new opening to creative engagement among the guiding institutions – an active, attentive and inventive collaboration, rooted in shared moral principles and expressed in mutually sustained programmes. Thus, we should focus on opening doors to creative engagement, between Muslims and Muslims, as well as between Muslims and Non-Muslims, in line with the following objectives:

- To correct the image of Islam which has been wrongly portrayed as promoting terrorism, conservatism, fanaticism, backwardness, poverty and other degrading stereotypes.
- To present Islam as a religion that promotes the concept of truthfulness and that thrives on tolerance and dynamism, while at the same time being full of extraordinarily pure and valuable universal precepts.
- To nurture a harmonious society whereby Muslims and Non-Muslims can live and prosper side by side.
- To provide a platform for Muslim and Non-Muslim scholars to discuss or analyse issues of mutual importance.
- To remove the jaundiced opinion and incorrect view among many Non-Muslims about Islam.

We should find ways and means to inculcate the understanding of Islam in areas generally considered to represent the world-view of Islam, which is actually global, rather than restrictive, in nature. Some of the important universal values and ethics are as follows:

Justice
On the subject of justice, Islam is a just religion and it is suitable for all societies, including multi-religious societies. However, the world is now dominated by the concept and principle of justice based on that of the Non-Muslim countries of the West. International laws provide the mighty with the right to suppress the weak, that is, might is right. Efforts to reassert the Islamic concept of justice are frowned upon by the West as an attempt to revive old and antiquated thinking. In Islam justice is supreme and clearly defined. It means placing something in its rightful place. The Objective of the creation of the universe is to uphold justice and truth, and remove cruelty and evil.

Justice in Islam is similar to the universal concept of justice. Allah demands Muslims to be fair and just, including in their treatment of the Non-Muslims. An Islamic government or one run by Muslims is certainly a benevolent, just and good administrator. If it is callous to its people, both Muslims and Non-Muslims, then it is not an Islamic government, or one based on Islamic teachings.

Justice is the number one prerequisite for a continued stability of a multi-racial, global society. The truth of the matter is that the principles of justice and tolerance are part and parcel of the Islamic history. Christians and Jews in Islamic Spain were given equal opportunity to study together with the Muslims. Furthermore, there was no inquisition under the Islamic administration.

Tolerance
Tolerance is yet another fundamental ethic of Islam. Islam has often been described as an egalitarian religion, and in a profound sense, this is true. The world into which Islam came in the seventh century was very far from egalitarian. To the east there was an elaborately structured and rather rigid class of pre-Islamic Iran, and beyond that an even more rigidly discriminatory caste system of Hindu India. To the west there were the systems of hereditary and privileged aristocracy, which Christendom had inherited from the Greco-Roman world and the Germanic barbarians like the Visigoths.

Contrariwise, the new religion of Islam did not undertake to condemn and persecute the non-believers. Rather, they enjoyed tolerance. Thus, for the Jews the arrival of Islam meant a change for the better, as they had already suffered under conditions of political, social, and economic instability during the reign of their previous masters. In the core countries of the Middle East like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, the Christian minorities also welcomed the Muslims. The reason was that though sharing the Christian religion with the rulers of the Byzantine Empire, they were of different sects and subject to discrimination and even at times to persecution. For many of the adherents of the Eastern churches, the advent of Islam and the transfer of their countries from Christian to Muslim rule brought a marked improvement in the circumstances, and a greater degree of religious freedom than they had previously enjoyed.

During the Islamic Civilization a good deal of easy social interaction existed among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Though professing different religious, they formed a single society, in which personal friendship, business partnership, intellectual discipleship, and other forms of shared activity were normal and, indeed, common. In Spain or Andalusia, Islam formed a syncretism and a cultural fusion based not only on its idea of universality and tolerance but also on its prodigious capacity for assimilation and creativity. It was also here that the most important ethnic and cultural fusion of East and West took place. The Muslim rulers of the Umayyad, Amirid and Taifa periods employed Jews in diplomacy, finance and public administration.

Thus, in multi-religious Malaysia, tolerance and respect have always been the hallmarks of the mutual relationship between the religious groups. Both Muslims and Non-Muslims are granted the freedom to observe the tenets of their religion, which include matters like worship, celebration, or other practices. Violence as a means of solving inter-racial and inter-religious disputes is abhorred by all communities of the country. The leadership bears the responsibility and obligation to achieve stability and development.

Today Malaysia, which is located at the periphery of the Islamic heartland, is a plural society. Subscribing to the Islamic principles of tolerance is the country's answer to the present realities and challenges of a pluralistic community. In economic terms, it encourages dynamic growth and material development. In political terms, it holds a religiously and ethnically mixed society together as a nation. With clear-sighted policy formulation and program implementation, the people have moved forward on the basis of tolerance and respect for differences and a commitment to emphasizing common ground while minimizing causes of friction.

Business Ethics

On the subject of business ethics, we are now looking at a very rapid explosion in terms of economic activities across the world. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, cautioned that in developing the Ummah, the basic aim of religion, that is to guide man in the correct path, cannot be sidelined. In order to ensure that whatever forms of economic development would take into account the nature of man as God's vice regent on Earth, he said (Mohamad, 1994):

> *"Religion should never be regarded as simply the rituals which affect people only at the individual level; religion, which seeks truth to establish justice in all aspects of societal life, should be regarded as beneficial to society. It is religion which acts as the anchor of underlying principles that govern not only the physical and material well being but also the spiritual growth and uplift of man. It is religion that steers people towards a more balanced life. It is also religion that provides true guidance and the strongest motivation towards achieving a more fruitful and meaningful life. Foremost among the issues at hand is to find out the ways and means of how a nation can produce a people or society that has as its core the deep sense of religious consciousness, committed to the highest standards of ethical and moral values and yet is most progressive, industrious, dynamic and dedicated towards advancement and progress. This is indeed very necessary and pertinent because we can easily achieve material progress by physical planning and development.*

Towards a Common Civilization

We realize that global ethics can also be promoted by deciphering the strengths of civilizations of the past, with the view of formulating a common civilization. Research has shown that civilizations like the Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Mongolian, Roman, Islamic, Turkish and British rose because the people were willing to organize their society and shape values and cultures which contributed to the greatness of their civilizations. By adhering to and practicing these values, the society became intelligent, efficient, wealthy, safe and strong. To attain a common civilization, we need to understand the role of values in life, culture and civilization. We have to determine and practice good values and discard the bad ones. Even though the values of a society are formed naturally, a society that wants to succeed must choose, plan and cultivate certain values, which are believed to be able to help it.

We strongly believe that there must now be an urgent appraisal of the interactions of cultures, so as to avoid untoward encounters. There is need for both the Non-Muslims and the Muslims to improve their perceptions of each other in order to improve their relations. By religious teaching and by culture Muslims are eminently amenable to reconciliation. If the Non-Muslims can change their views of Islam and the Muslims, it is possible for reconciliation to be effected and a completely new relationship established between them, a relationship that

will solve most of the conflict that we see today and will certainly prevent any clash of civilizations in the future. The experience that Malaysia has leading a violence-free Muslim majority country would perhaps qualify us to provide the example of a truly Islamic *modus vivendi* in inter-religious and inter-civilizational accord.

Therefore, during my service as Director General of a think tank institute in Malaysia (1992 – 2002), "The Institute of Islamic Understanding" (IKIM), several inter-faith discourses were organized over those ten years. In 1993, a joint seminar on *Islam and its world-view* was organized with the Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange. One of the resolutions that came out of the seminar read, "There must be respite from the crude polemics of East versus West". Another dialogue was held together with the Goethe Institute where the theme *The Role and Influence of Religion in Society* was chosen. The then German Ambassador to Malaysia reaffirmed the many common elements of Islamic and Christian religious and social orders.

An international conference on *The Islamic World and Global Corporation* was convened jointly with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. One of the most important and significant proposals then was the establishment of an alternative media network in the Muslim world to combat biased reporting. And we can see today how vital this network would have been for, not only the dignity, but also survival, of the Muslim *ummah.* Therefore, Muslims are now at the mercy of the international media community, which is intent upon pitting one Islamic group against the other.

Another inter-faith dialogue organized in Malaysia was the one titled *Towards a Common Civilization*, which was graced by His Excellency Dr. Roman Herzog, the then President of Germany. Dr. Herzog was impressed at the approach Malaysia had taken to promote inter-cultural understanding.

Towards the end of 1997, yet another cross-culture event was co-hosted with the Japanese Institute of International Affairs. The aim of the symposium on *Asia and Islam* was to promote the understanding of Islam in Asia generally, and Japan particularly.

IKIM's other venture into inter-civilization dialogue was a joint seminar with the European Union. A number of the participants expressed surprise at the fact that Islam actually flourished beyond the Middle-East. Malaysia, it seems, offers a different version of a modern and prosperous Moslem state.

There is no doubt that in global ethics at least, religions can play a more effective and expanded role in this era of globalization, because they have the spiritual, intellectual and moral resources to provide the appropriate answers, solutions and responses to the issues of the day. The basic universal principles of religions such as condemning greed and destructiveness, while commending restraint and protection, could be adopted. How can religion contribute to the flourishing of global ethics? The contribution of religious communities to global ethics is three-fold. Religious communities are grass-roots communities of moral deliberation and formation on matters of extended rights. Religious communities are also international institutions. In that role, they can be present as advocates in international policy-making as well as locally, regionally, and nationally. And religious communities are perhaps above all, shapers and keepers of overarching meaning and values as mediated across ages and generations.

However, if the established world religions fail to provide the proper guidance as well as holistic action plans for the continued well-being of man's nature in the more challenging years and decades ahead in a globalized world, then the spiritual and moral vacuum will be filled by the new religions, occult movements, charismatic sects, deviant mysticism, religious fraud or doomsday cult (Hassan, 2000).

Looking at the bigger picture each nation, therefore, will have to make room for the expansion of religious-based ethics and spiritual values into all realms of living, from business to international relations, from politics to law, and from medicine to technology. An example is provided by the effort to incorporate religious ethics in tackling the issues of global environmental degradation.

Eco-ethicism of the world's major religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism and Taoism, has been consulted extensively by the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions in the last few years to come up with guiding religious principles pertaining to sustainable development. The secular eco-ethical approach alone has not proven to be successful in nature conservation campaigns. It is clear that bioethics needs to be complemented and supported by deep convictions that transcend virtually all these religions, giving rise to a moral framework based on a global human unity that emphasizes care for the earth, generosity toward all creatures, compassion for all that suffer and sees all things together in or before the divine, and therefore considered precious.

In the final analysis, the lack of a universal, spiritual-based ethics in this globalization era would only serve to aggravate the existing crises, sufferings, injustices and conflicts. These parting words which are quoted from a book titled *Globalisation: The Perspectives and Experiences of the Religious Traditions of Asia Pacific* (Camilleri and Muzaffar, 1998) sum up the feeling of several scholars on the future of religion and hence ethics, in a globalized world :

> *"More than any other cultural force, religion will become the singular most important force resisting the tendency towards uniformity. It is religion that will become the moral armour against the battery of sensate culture and ensure that we remain faithful to our own primordial nature and ethical roots. It is religion that will ensure that the world remains multicultural, rather than being dominated by a single Colossus. But globalisation has set the stage for an encounter of religions on an unprecedented scale… (which) entails a coexistence among believers of different creeds founded upon tolerance and mutual respect".*

In this modern world both Muslims and Non-Muslims have a real mission. They must bring back the spiritual values to a world that is fast becoming Godless and thoroughly materialistic; so arrogant that it thinks it knows all the answers to everything; a world which will develop the ultimate of destruction and place it in the hands of irresponsible and insane individuals; a world teetering on the brink of a Man-made Apocalypse. And because the human race is becoming more and more arrogant, religion and spiritual values are needed even more.

Islam can provide the spiritual values, to those who believe and to those who do not. And if the Muslims chose to play a constructive role while retaining their faith, their spiritual values and their true brotherhood, they would be able to contribute positively to the development of

mankind, to put it on an even keel again and to prevent the self-destruct course which the human race appears to be heading for. The Muslims can be a force for human good in the 21st Century.

I used to attend several intellectual discourses and forums, including the dialogue in Berlin in 1999, where I could observe the seriousness of scholars from non Muslim countries in Asia and Europe, in discussing current issues pertaining to intercultural interactions between Islam and the rest of the world. They stressed positively the need to maintain a healthy bilateral relationship in generating global co-operation based on tolerance, knowledge-sharing and joint programmes between the Muslim world and their nations. The idea of the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996) was rejected by the majority of scholars. It is really important to co-operate between Muslim and non-Muslim in the area of education and research.

It is hoped that these pertinent issues, as well as the issues of the portrayal of Islam in the international media, can be discussed scientifically and openly in an effort to identify the underlying cause of this malaise in the Muslim world.

The discussion on matters relating to religions and nations should be held void of sentiments and emotions. I am happy to note that some non Muslim scholars I meet have a very deep understanding and interest in issues in the Muslim world and Islam itself. They look at these issues systemically and openly, and they seem to show an inclination towards an open attitude in accepting the relevance of Islam in the modern world.

The fact that the non Muslim world is seriously studying and researching issues vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims should make the Muslims aware that there is an urgent need to scrutinize the research activities conducted by the Muslim academics and scholars in the Muslim world. We Muslims should be brave enough to pose some critical questions to our own Muslim brothers and sisters: Are the research and scholarly activities showing improvement and maturity? What are the issues being researched and discussed by Muslim scholars and *ulamaks*? Are we addressing current issues brought about by the rapid advancement in ICT and biotechnology? Or are we still busy debating on matters pertaining to decrees (*fatawa*) and injunctions (*Ahkam)?*

Sometime, I feel as if Muslims are still discussing matters based on partisanship, sentiments and emotions. Sadly, in doing so, we have made Islam so limited and narrow, while in reality Islam is a complete way of life, which is very wide in scope and global in nature. It is sadder still that the non-Muslim scholars are the ones who are seriously studying contemporary Islamic issues from a very global perspective.

Conclusion
Islam as a religion, and Muslims as its believers, should take the advantage presented by globalization in disseminating the true and correct image of Islam. What we see today is that Muslims are the ones who are "receiving" or "importing" values, norms and cultures from the rest of the world. In some instances, it has been noted that Muslims are more western than the west themselves.

Globalization has enabled a barrage of information and cultures to reach our doorstep. However this may not necessarily be a good thing. Not all that is offered by globalization is good, and not all is bad either. Muslims must be able to differentiate the good from the bad

when it comes to globalization. Globalization can be regarded as a double-edged sword which can bring both advantages and disadvantages.

Nevertheless, it is imperative for Muslims to acquire sufficient knowledge to enable them to ride the tide of globalization. Muslims must not be satisfied by just being able to "ride the tide"; instead Muslims must also be capable to "decide the direction of the tide". To be able to do this, the essential ingredient is knowledge. This is the underlying reason why Islam stresses the importance of acquiring knowledge, as evident from the first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad, PBUH.

Islam has a lot to offer to everyone in this globalized world. In an era where people are searching for the meaning and direction of life, Islam can provide the answer. Islamic values, norms and ethics are universal – and global –in nature. It can be understood and accepted by everyone. As such, through the advancement of ICT, Islam and Muslims can indeed reap the many benefits by showing to the global village what Islam really stands for and what Islam is really all about.

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