

# Conversions defeat aim of interfaith: Don

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KOTA KINABALU: People from various religious backgrounds can come up with a common set of principles on how to deal with multi-religious Malaysia if they could create an environment conducive to interfaith dialogue.

"Let's put it this way, if we are going to do two things such as interfaith dialogue and proselytising...these two are mutually opposed," said Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Language and Knowledge Upgrading Centre lecturer, Sanen Marshall.

"Thus, we cannot have interfaith dialogue if parties in the country are also interested in proselytisation because it brings about suspicion," he said.

He said this after presenting his talk titled 'Are interfaith dialogue and proselytising mutually



Sanen

opposed? Towards a set of principles for conducting oneself in a multi-religious Malaysia' conducted in conjunction with the National Conference on Religion and Society in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)

The conference was organised by UMS' Association of Mixed Methods Researchers and the Language and Knowledge Upgrading Centre, with its theme 'Malaysia's Community and Religion Dynamic in the 21st Century'.

"We cannot have an environment that is conducive to interfaith dialogue

if people are committed as groups and not just as individuals talking to one another but as organised groups to bring other people out of their original faith into another faith," he said.

"The other thing would be that what is the thing for different communities and interfaith dialogue,

what is the state of interfaith dialogue, this issue was forced on us because the media brought it up which is fair enough because that is what the media is supposed to do.

"But there are a lot of issues that the media will not bring up that people would have to take their own initiative, as formalities to look at them because some of these issues are not religious as they are portrayed," he said.

He said issues of environment are not religious, but every single Christian, Muslim and Buddhist has an opinion of environment and the same goes for issues of corruption where everybody has an opinion...but why can't people sit together and talk?

"So it's not just a religious issue that has been forced on us, we have to be proactive and take a proactive stand on issues like corruption, environment, democracy, transparency of government issues of rule of law, issues of social norms and interactions, relations between men and women.

"We have to sit as different people of different faiths at the same table and start talking to each other," he said, adding that if this can't be done at the national level, then we have to start doing it at lower levels.

"When I talk about starting from a lower level, we look at issues at the lower level, for example if we have issues at schools than let's get all the religions and talk about it because if we don't talk about it then it goes on to a higher level and becomes a really big political issue," he said.

He said universities could also lead the way to interfaith forum and have speakers of different faiths to come in.

"Even if it can't be done at the national level, what's wrong with getting academicians from various universities together and talk, and perhaps even come up with a common set of principles on how to deal with environment or how university education is supposed to be," he said.