

## INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: CONDUIT OF PLURALISM OR DA'WAH

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### ABSTRACT

Despite having been in practice for a few decades, implementing religious dialogue in Malaysia is still not very encouraging. This fact is reportedly linked to scepticism towards interreligious dialogue in general. Interreligious dialogue is frequently interpreted falsely as a means of advancing religious pluralism, which is destructive to *aqidah*. However, a case study on two Islamic organisations (the Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) and the Islamic Information Services (IIS), showed that these organisations had included interreligious dialogue in their *da'wah* (propagation of Islam) efforts. The data from this case study was gathered using interview and document analysis methods. In addition to reviewing Islamic groups involved in interreligious dialogue and *da'wah*, this article also attempts to assess the roles of interreligious dialogue in *da'wah* as outlined in the Qu'ran. This article introduces a novel approach to the discipline of interreligious dialogue by combining a socio-psychological and theological framework to explore interreligious dialogue in Malaysia. The findings of this article offer practical implications for dialogue practitioners and organisations that will enable them to refine their own dialogue models based on the many styles and designs of dialogue identified. Additionally, the results show that dialogue is not detrimental to *aqidah* or a platform for religious pluralism, but rather it can be used to propagate Islamic *da'wah*.

**Keywords:** Dialogue, design, *da'wah*, Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

Whilst article 11 of the Federal Constitution guarantees everyone the right to practise their religion freely, the dominance of Islamic traditions and values in this country has led to discontent among the non-Muslim community. The 1980s saw an increase in Islamic organisations and initiatives, which caused uneasiness among non-Muslims.

Among major Islamic programmes carried out by the government during that period were the establishment of Islamic banks, Islamic pawnshops, Islamic insurance and an Islamic Economic Foundation in 1981; the establishment of an International Islamic University Malaysia in 1983 and declaring the status of Islamic judges and courts to be on an

equal level with the civil judges in 1988 (Hussin Mutalib, 1993). According to Abdul Rahman Embong (2001), the growth of Islamic resurgence groups and the expansion of Islamic culture and ideals in the social sphere had transformed Malaysia's interethnic relations in the 1980s into a dismal chapter.

Non-Muslims have expressed concerns about Malaysia becoming a theocratic state, which would restrict people's freedom of religion and reinforce the Malay position, in addition to restrictions on the development of their places of worship and cemetery sites. Moreover, they are also concerned about the prohibition on the use of certain Arabic-derived Malay words such as Allah, *solah*, *bayt Allah* and *Kaaba*, the prohibition on the publication of the Bible in *bahasa Melayu*, the education system that focuses on Islamic education rather than the education of other religions, the surplus of Islamic programmes in the national media, and freedom of conversion for the Muslim (Ahmad F. Yousif, 2004). The ultimate aim of the Islamic programmes is to advance the idea of moderate Islam in Malaysia's multi-ethnic community (Yeoh, 2007). However, due to a lack of information on the content and implementation of such programmes, non-Muslims have become anxious and tend to express their discontentment with these Islamic developments because they believe it will undermine their cultural and religious values.

Interreligious issues, typically resolved by undiplomatic measures, have an impact on interreligious relations in Malaysia, for instance, the conversion of three minors to Islam without the consent of their non-Muslim mother (Anbalagan, 2022). In order to address interreligious conflicts and present a fuller understanding of Islam, dialogue should begin in earnest in this country. Unfortunately, dialogue is frequently viewed as a conduit for advancing conversion and religious pluralism, which is harmful to *aqidah*. The discussion that follows will be centred on these two goals: first, to examine the significance of interreligious dialogue in conveying the Islamic faith as revealed in the Qur'an; and second, to evaluate Islamic organisations that are engaged in interreligious dialogue and *da'wah*. In order to accomplish these goals, a case study on two Islamic organisations, namely Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) and Islamic Information Services (IIS) was carried out.

Among the main instruments used in this research for collecting data were semi-structured interviews and document analysis. A semi-structured interview is significant for a multiple case studies design in order to ensure cross-case comparability (Bryman, 2008).

Shah Kirit Kalkulal Govindji, a Chief Da'wah Officer of IIS and Kamaruddin Abdullah, the President of IPSI were among the key persons interviewed. Besides the interview, this research also used the document analysis method to obtain data. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), documents that are valuable to researchers include e-mail records, textbooks, memos, letters, logs of meetings, demographic information such as attendance, enrolment and detailed information about subjects. For the purpose of this research, among the documents collected were from websites, booklets and pamphlets. These documents complemented any missing information during the interview.

### **Interreligious Dialogue and Da'wah in The Qu'ran**

Some would contend that a Muslim's *aqidah* could be in jeopardy by exposure to other religions through interreligious dialogue. Contrarily, the Qu'ran has provided several dialogic methods in dealing with non-Muslims. Allah SWT says in the Qu'ran, in *surah Al-Nahl* verse 125 which means: *“Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance.”*

In another *surah*, Allah SWT says which means: *“Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better; then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate.”* (Al-Fussilat: 34).

And, in another, which means: *“Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo! He hath transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear.”* (Taha: 43-44)

These verses unequivocally state that Islam encourages diplomacy and wisdom when engaging in da'wah. If the other party rejected Islam, then he should be left to his choice; there is no compulsion in Islam. This is clearly stated in the Qu'ran (which means): *“Say, ‘O ye who reject Faith, I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine.’”* (Al-Kafirun: 1-3)

In other verses, Allah SWT reassures the Muslims that their responsibility is only to deliver the message of Islam to non-Muslims and not to force them to become believers: *“If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Wilt thou then*

*compel mankind, against their will, to believe!” (Yunus: 99)*

*“So remind, you are only one who reminds. You are not a dictator over them.” (Al-Ghasiyah: 21-22) “So if they dispute with thee, say, ‘I have submitted my whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me.’ And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned, ‘Do ye (also) submit yourselves?’ If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the message; and in Allah’s sight are (all) His servants.” (Al-Imran: 20)*

Islam teaches the gentle dialogic approach in engaging with non- Muslims and in *da’wah* as demonstrated in the Qu’ran. Islam certainly does not hinder dialogue because the Qu’ran features it inherently.

### **Islamic Organisations Engage in Interreligious Dialogue and Da’wah**

There are relatively few organisations in Malaysia that reflect the Quranic dialogical approach to *da’wah* such as Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) and Islamic Information Services (IIS). These organisations, therefore, were selected as samples in this case study. In the discussion that follows, the background of these organisations, the main goals in implementing interreligious dialogue and the organisational dialogue designs, will be covered.

The four types of dialogue as proposed by Zúñiga and Nagda (2001) were used to categorise the dialogue design. The four types are collective inquiry, critical-dialogic education, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as community building and social action.

### **Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI)**

#### **Organisation background**

Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) was established in 1989, committed to spreading the message of *tawhid* (Islamic Propagation Society International [IPSI], n.d.a). The main approach adopted by IPSI to achieve this goal is the comparative religion approach. This includes encouraging Qu’ran recitation with translation to make it easier for people to understand, guided mosques tour for non-Muslims, public lectures delivered by eminent Muslim scholars, and printed booklets authored by renowned comparative religious scholars

such as Ahmed Deedat, Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, Gary Miller, Zakir Naik, Imran Hussein, Yvonne Ridley, Daniel Zainal Abidin and others (IPSI, n.d.b).

### **Goals in Implementing Interreligious Dialogue**

By implementing interreligious dialogue, IPSI seeks to eradicate negative perceptions and attitudes about Islam. Additionally, another purpose of interreligious dialogue is to strengthen interreligious relations in Malaysia. Ultimately, the goal of IPSI in conducting interreligious dialogue is to propagate Islam. The greatest way to accomplish this goal is through dialogue since it can draw non-Muslims through its multi-religious approach: “Our first goal is to bring to breach the gap, *untuk merapatkan jurang. Jurang salah faham, jurang perpaduan, jurang* prejudice; we try to narrow down the gap and then number two is to make people understand what Islam is all about because Islam is the most misunderstood religion. Number three is to propagate Islam our intention is to propagate Islam to share Islam with them (K. Abdullah (personal communication), October 25, 2010).

### **Dialogue Design**

A significant proportion of IPSI initiatives, including public lectures, mosques tour, free Islamic classes, distribution of Islamic literature, and interreligious dialogue, fall within the category of critical-dialogic education.

### **Critical-dialogic Education**

Interreligious dialogue is frequently organised at IPSI with the collaboration of students from the University of Science Malaysia (Penang Campus). Islamic Propagation Society International also host an exhibition to raise awareness of its interreligious dialogue programme. Seminars or forums with guest speakers from main religions in Malaysia such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism discussing selected themes are among the dialogue formats that IPSI typically adapts.

Each speaker in the forum will have twenty minutes to present. Then, there will be time for questions and answers, followed by the speakers delivering their final address. IPSI’s question-and-answer sessions are lengthier and more in-depth compared to other organisations’ dialogue programmes. This session will give the audience chances to clear up any misunderstandings.

As long as they follow the instructions given at the beginning of the programme, participants are free to ask any questions during the question- and-answer segment. Participants are reminded at the beginning of a dialogue programme to act professionally, adopt a “agree to disagree” stance, and never ask sensitive or offensive questions or inquire about theological matters (K. Abdullah (personal communication), October 25, 2010).

## **Islamic Information and Services Foundation (IIS)**

### **Organisation Background**

Another non-profit organisation devoted to da’wah is the Islamic Information and Services Foundation (IIS), which offers courses on Islam, services for reverts and potential reverts, *da’i* training, services that are beneficial for community development, programmes that promote *islah* (reform), address misinformation and misconceptions about Islam, and provide a platform for *da’wah* activities for Muslims (Islamic Information and Services Foundation [IIS], 2006). A key *da’wah* initiative that IIS pioneered was the “Hotel Quran Project”. The Qu’ran with English translations were successfully distributed throughout Peninsular Malaysia’s top 4 and 5-star hotels through this project: “*Di antara program- program yang telah kita lakukan adalah seperti “Hotel Quran Project”. Biasa kalau kita masuk hotel ke, buka laci jumpa Bible. So, kita buat projek ini, dan telah edarkan enam puluh ribu naskhah Quran, terjemahan bahasa Inggeris, dengan original text bahasa Arab sekali kepada lebih daripada seratus hotel- hotel lima bintang, empat bintang seluruh Malaysia kecuali Sabah Sarawak dan apa ni...lebih enam puluh ribu naskhah telah diedarkan. Dua fasa, satu fasa tiga puluh ribu jadi dua fasa enam puluh ribu naskhah. Dan insya-Allah kita mahu masuk fasa ketiga dan harapan bolehlah kita edarkan Quran di Sabah Sarawak pula. Dan “Hotel Quran Project” ini bergantung pada sumbangan orang ramai, Syarikat-syarikat swasta, NGO Islam, jabatan agama dan sebagainya. So, atas sumbangan orang ramai dan apa yang kita cetak, kita bekalkan pada hotel secara percuma. Tidak ada diambil keuntungan langsung daripada projek ini.*” (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji (personal communication), January 24, 2011).

### **Goals in Implementing Interreligious Dialogue**

Islamic Information and Services Fundation considers interreligious dialogue as a strategy for propagating the message of Islam to adherents of other faiths. Muslims have the opportunity

to learn more about other religions as well as Islam through interreligious dialogue. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is also part of the ventures to strengthen the faith of Muslims. Some would contend that exposure to other religions can undermine a Muslim's faith, yet IIS upholds Allah's promise as recorded in the Qu'ran in surah Al-Baqarah, verse 256 that falsehood will never override the truth.

*“Ok, tujuan utamanya ada beberapa; yang pertama sekali kita sebagai orang Islam, satu kewajiban kita berdakwah kepada bukan Islam. Dan kalau kita lihat senario di Malaysia ini, terlalu amat kurang, hampir tidak ada kita berdakwah kepada non-Muslim. So, interfaith talk ini adalah satu wacana yang sesuai untuk kita menyampaikan dakwah Islam kepada mereka. Tetapi pada masa yang sama, mereka juga menyampaikan agama mereka kepada orang Islam. So, dia two-ways. So, di sini bergantung siapa yang lebih mahir dalam menyampaikan mesej agama dia. So, di situlah yang mewakili agama Islam itu memainkan peranan penting. Itu yang pertama; yang kedua, sebagai satu pendedahan juga kepada orang Islam sendiri supaya boleh bandingkan...boleh bezakan antara agama Islam dengan agama-agama lain. Dan juga sebagai peserta daripada agama lain pun untuk membandingkan agama dia sendiri dengan agama lain yang ada. So, ini satu bentuk education. Dalam surah Al-Baqarah, surah nombor dua ayat dua ratus lima puluh enam, Allah SWT berfirman, “La ikraha fiddin,” - tidak ada paksaan dalam agama. Kalau kita baca sampai situ, kan? Tetapi sambungannya ialah, Allah SWT menjelaskan pada kita yang hak tak sama dengan yang batil. Yang hak tak sama dengan yang batil. Jadi bila kita sampaikan Islam dan mereka sampaikan agama-agama lain. Jadi orang akan nampak clear yang mana hak, yang mana batil. Jadi tujuannya, tujuan dakwah. Itu objektif utama di situ dan untuk memantapkan akidah orang Islam itu sendiri. Supaya tadi memahami, mengenali agama dia sendiri.” (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji (personal communication), January 24, 2011).*

### **Dialogue Design**

Islamic Information Services has adopted a number of designs for interreligious dialogue including similar designs found in other organisations as well as some distinctive designs. These various designs have been categorised into different types. Islamic Information Services

### **Critical-dialogic Education**

A typical interreligious dialogue program will involve three to four different religious groups

in a dialogue. However, some of IIS' initiative for interreligious dialogue is unique from those of other organisations because it merely engages two religions. For instance, dialogue between Islamic and Buddhist groups only, or dialogue between Islamic and Hindu groups only. An example of this type of dialogue design was a program entitled "Sowing Seeds of Understanding and Harmony", an interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Buddhists community. It was held on May 8, 2010, at Hang Tuah Room, Mines Wellness Hotel in Seri Kembangan. This dialogue programme was split into two main sessions (morning and afternoon sessions). Participants comprised representatives of the Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) from the Buddhist Maha Vihara (BMV) and a delegation from IIS. The Buddhist speaker was represented by Suthoda Thero, while the Muslim speaker was represented by Shah Kirit Kalkulal Govindji from IIS.

There was a round of questions and answers after the presentation. After the lunch break, the second session began at noon. The discussion in this session was on potential future cooperation between Muslims and Buddhists, similar to the preceding fruitful dialogue experience with Hindu Sanggam. Four future plans were ultimately agreed upon during the dialogue: the commencement of religious talks, visits, youth activities, and specific question-and-answer sessions (Islamic Information and Services Foundation [IIS], 2010).

### **Conflict Resolution and Peace Building**

Islamic Information Services is also actively conducting personal discussions with other religious organisations like the personal discussion IIS had with Hindu Sanggam in August 2008. This dialogue was off-limits to the general public since it covered sensitive subjects related to Hindu-Muslim relations in this country. Because of this, the best definition of this type of dialogue is conflict resolution.

The dialogue was jointly organised with the Allied Coordinative Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN). Hindu and Muslim leaders and representatives took part in this historic two-day discussion. Sensitive topics impacting both religions were discussed in an open but professional manner throughout this dialogue. Cemeteries, the demolition of Hindu temples, and conversion (whether to Hinduism or Islam) were among the topics discussed. This dialogue seeks to dispel any misunderstandings that can cause polarisation. At the end of this dialogue, Muslims and Hindus had reached a consensus on a few matters and were prepared to collaborate in future. This dialogue also included various recreational activities



like sailing and a chess tournament.

*“Pada permulaan tu, bila kita lihat permulaan bila kita ajak...sebab kita akan initiate. Yang initiate, orang Islam. Kita di IIS, kita initiate. Dengan kerjasama NGO-NGO lain sekali. Jadi apa yang biasa kita lihat daripada agama lain tu macam berat nak ikut. Kita pun takut juga, kita pun suspens juga tentang apa akan berlaku. Tapi kita buat juga. Tapi bila habis tu, dua hari, mereka tunjukkan cerita...wah, mereka sangat gembira, sangat happy...kalaulah dialog macam ni telah berlaku dua puluh tahun lepas, tiga puluh tahun lepas...hari ni kita takde masalah. Sampai begitu dia punya komen. Sampai kita jadi very rapat. Sebab dalam dialog ni bukan kita hanya bergaduh. Kita juga ada sesi berlayar bersama-bersama, kita ada pertandingan main chess...main catur...so kita ada aktiviti untuk membina hubungan sekali. Semua tu tersusun dengan baik.”* (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji, personal communication, January 24, 2011)

## DISCUSSION

In light of the data from the case study of the two organisations, some crucial points can be underscored. First, as Muslims in a culturally diverse country like Malaysia, we must alter how we approach non-Muslims and interreligious issues. Undeniably, it is a privilege to be born as a Malay Muslim in Malaysia with Islam as a religion of the federation. It does not, however, justify our exclusive and ethnocentric attitude toward non-Muslims. It is essentially inconsistent with Islamic values, which consider Islam a mercy extended to everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. As Allah SWT says in the Qu’ran, which means: *“And We have sent you (O, Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the ‘alamin.”* (Al- Anbiya’: 107)

As previously stated, Islam has embraced the dialogic approach in dealing with non-Muslims. Even if they reject the invitation to Islam, we should not ever speak to them in a hostile or offensive manner. Even in the face of Pharaoh, Allah had reminded the Prophet Moses A.S to use gentle words: *“Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo! He hath transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear.”* (Taha: 43-44)

The same dialogical strategy has also been applied by the two Islamic organisations being studied, IPSI and IIS. In 2008, IIS convened a closed dialogue with the Hindu Sanggam to deal with sensitive interreligious issues. Compared to open debate or public protest, this

was possibly the finest strategy for addressing interreligious disputes and conflicts. The role of interreligious dialogue in managing interreligious issues has been highlighted by a few researchers. Muhammad Farid Muhammad Syahran (2008) for instance, asserts that dialogue is intended to address the “technical” issue that is associated with religious matters. The construction of temples and the distinction between civil and Syariah court systems are two examples of issues that have been brought up about religious administration and the application of law that have an impact on other religions. According to Hashim Musa (2005), interreligious dialogue is an ideal platform for non-Muslims to learn about Islam directly from the source.

Second, the interreligious dialogue will never harm a Muslim *aqidah* otherwise IPSI and IIS will never use interreligious dialogue as part of their *da'wah* methods. It is evident from the main goals of the two organisations. Islamic Information Services for instance, purposely uses interreligious dialogue as a platform to convey the message of Islam to people of other religions.

The interreligious dialogue could be the best setting for *da'wah* because it gathers people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. There should not be an issue of Muslims being influenced by other religions. As mentioned in the Qu'ran surah Al-Baqarah verse 256 which means: “*There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower.*”

This verse also accentuates that, those who have faith in Allah will not be easily led astray because the truth will always prevail. According to al-Faruqi, dialogue between Islam and other faiths will eventually lead to the recognition of Islam as *ad-din al-fitrah*.

Dialogue removes all barriers between men to allow for free intercourse of ideas where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder's claim to the truth win. Dialogue disciplines our consciousness to recognise the truth inherent in realities and figurations of realities beyond our usual reach (Al-Faruqi, 1992: 9). Thirdly, dialogue practitioners and organisations should consider evaluating their own interreligious dialogue designs to enhance the efficacy of interreligious dialogue. Over the past few years, there are many government agencies, NGOs, and higher education institutions involved in the interreligious dialogue in

Malaysia. Those organisations include the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Akademi Kajian Ketamadunan (Academy of Civilizational Studies), Pure Life Society, Fostering Interreligious Encounters (FIRE), Centre for Civilizational Dialogue of University of Malaya (UM), Malaysian Interfaith Network (MIN), Faculty of Islamic Studies of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia), Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), and International Movement for a Just World (JUST) (Ghazali Basri, 2005).

The dialogue models practiced by IPSI and IIS could be replicated by these organisations to enrich their own dialogue models. Both IPSI and IIS had ample experience in organising various interreligious dialogue models such as community building, critical-dialogic education and conflict resolution. Arfah et. al (2020) proposed some themes that were appropriate for interreligious dialogue; among the themes were religious rights and equality; participant's faith and god; others' faiths and gods; economic issues; political issues; social issues; religious festivals; participant's culture and traditions, others' cultures and traditions, leisure (sports, foods, entertainments); their personal experiences living in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society and family or work life.

Additionally, certain themes should be avoided for example sensitive interreligious issues and any themes related to special privilege and discrimination. The findings from current research, therefore, serve as a reference for other dialogue practitioners and organisations to enrich and improve their own dialogue designs.

## **CONCLUSION**

By combining a socio-psychological and theological framework to evaluate interreligious dialogue in Malaysia, this research offers a unique approach to the study of interreligious dialogue. The primary outcomes of this study show that there are several other ways we can deal with interreligious issues and clear up any misconceptions. One of the ways is interreligious dialogue. Numerous types of research have shown that involvement in dialogues leads to positive improvements among the participants. Among the positive changes as identified by Schoem and Hurtado (2001) include increased social and personal awareness of identity and differences, a better understanding of other social identity groups and societal differences, a stronger commitment to social obligations and action, less stereotyping, more complex thinking, better communication skills and a better ability to

handle conflict.

Therefore, in dealing with interreligious issues or conflicts, we should use more diplomatic methods like dialogue rather than an aggressive one. The fact that all Islamic organisations in this study used interreligious dialogue as a component of their *da'wah* efforts furthered the premise that it is a good platform for *da'wah* and never posed a threat to one's *aqidah*. As IPSI and IIS engage in a variety of interreligious dialogue models, this study also provides practical implications by offering dialogue practitioners and organisations a clear grasp of their particular interreligious dialogue models. Apart from the many types of dialogue (collective inquiry community building, critical- dialogic education, and conflict resolution) proposed by Zúñiga and Nagda (2001), dialogue practitioners and organisations can also consider applying the intergroup dialogue stages in their dialogue models.

The dialogue should start with stage one, that is, participating groups begin to form and build relationships. It will then progress to the second stage, which is exploring differences and commonalities of experience. Stage three will include exploring and dialoguing on issues of conflict, while stage four is where action planning and alliance building take place. Dialogue practitioners and organisations can enhance and enrich their current dialogue models based on the types, designs and stages suggested in this research.

Before we start engaging more actively in interreligious dialogue, it is anticipated that we first need to raise Malaysian society's awareness of the dialogue concept because Malaysians in general, the Muslim community in particular, are still unclear of and sceptical about interreligious dialogue.

Research conducted by Azrinah Abdul Rahah (2009) reveals that university students have a better understanding and more positive attitudes towards interreligious dialogue. The present research has also demonstrated that most of the interreligious dialogue participants comprised religious leaders, scholars, NGO members and university students.

In order to support the dialogue initiative and ensure that interreligious dialogue can be promoted outside of NGOs and higher education institutions which consequently attract a wide range of participants, support from the government is necessary. Society needs to be made aware that interreligious dialogue does not necessarily involve discussions on theological aspects, but it also involves interreligious cooperation in humanitarian endeavours.

This type of dialogue is known as a dialogue of social action or dialogue on collective action (Rahimin Affandi et al., 2011). The interreligious dialogue in the form of cooperation is evident in the efforts of some Muslim and non-Muslim NGOs in mobilizing humanitarian missions such as eradicating poverty, drug addiction, AIDS and many more (Ahmad Sunawari, 2003). The issue of religious pluralism will not come to light because the main focus will be on cooperation for mutual well-being rather than issues related to religious doctrine or rituals. Successful interreligious dialogue would not only strengthen one's *aqidah* but also serve as a platform for *da'wah* and a way of fostering stronger ties between people of diverse religions.

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