

forum, two introductory remarks were made, one by Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil, IAIS Deputy CEO, and the second by Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid, President of MAPIM. The first forum speaker, Muslim Imran, Director of the Palestine Cultural Organisation Malaysia, spoke in detail about the state of the Palestinian resistance and liberation movement since 1947 and the pressing issues currently facing it. The second panelist, His Excellency Mr. Atif Sharif Mian, Deputy Chief of Mission of the High Commission of Pakistan to Malaysia, shared the history of the Kashmiri conflict up until the recent controversial decision by Modi's government, which has attracted global condemnation.

The event ended with a joint Palestine-Kashmir Kuala Lumpur Declaration, signed by 13 organisations. Amongst other things the declaration demanded that all Indian troops withdraw from Kashmir and return the territory to normalcy while reinstating Article 370, and that the right of return be rendered unconditionally to all Palestinians and that all Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails be released.

**5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference & Workshop “Education and Culture in Promoting Harmony and National Integration”**  
**Keynote address by Datuk Seri Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department**  
**(IAIS Malaysia, 19 October 2019)**

*Ahmad Badri Abdullah*

On 19 October 2019, IAIS in collaboration with Harmony Malaysia, organised its 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference & Workshop under the theme: ‘Education and Culture in Promoting Harmony and National Integration’. The event was officiated by the Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department, Datuk Seri Dr. Mujahid Yusof Rawa. In his officiating speech, the Minister argued that economic development is not enough for a country without solid national integration and unity. Amid growing social disintegration in Malaysia, where prejudices and mistrust are rife, the Minister assured the audience that the new government aspired towards unity at all costs. Therefore, he argued, as the country is in dire need of a new narrative of Islam that should be a catalyst for unity, his ministry has become committed to promoting the compassionate aspects of the religion, coining the term *Rahmatan lil ‘Alamin* (blessing for the universe). The conference saw presentations by three prominent figures, Prof. Dato’ Teo Kok Seong, the Principle Research Fellow of the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) UKM, Dr. Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj, chairperson for the Malaysian

Socialist Party (PSM), and Mr. Anas Zubedy, the managing director of Zubedy (M) Sdn. Bhd. Dr. Jeyakumar in his talk argued that society can only truly embrace its plurality when it realises and behaves as Malaysian. He added that while complete racial equality is not feasible, as the land was originally Malay, some basic constitutional rights must relentlessly be upheld. Prof. Teo in his talk proposed that the Malay language should always be the impetus of unity, and therefore should be the medium of instruction in every educational institution. As there is a lack of multi-cultural appreciation between the races in Malaysia, Prof. Teo proposed that schools provide avenues through their curriculum for fostering integrated and mutual understanding. In the same vein, Anas Zubedy argued that Malaysia could be deemed a nation with a wounded heart as we are suffering from a critical trust deficit. Therefore, we need to heal the wound by cultivating a culture of fairness, self-criticism, compassion, empathy and moderation. The presentations were followed by an interactive question and answer session.

**In Conversation with Abdennour Bidar: On Multi-religious Societies  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
(IAIS Malaysia, 24 October 2019)**

*Wan Naim Wan Mansor*

The event was hosted and organised by IAIS Malaysia in collaboration with the Embassy of France in Malaysia and Alliance Française de Kuala Lumpur. The public talk is part of the French Talks series aimed at creating a space for dialogue and a bridge between French and Malaysian cultures. The event featured Abdennour Bidar, French philosopher and author of *L'Islam sans soumission* (Islam without Submission), and IAIS Deputy CEO, Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil, as the moderator. The event brought together a healthy crowd of 150 attendees, which included local activists, NGO workers, and representatives from the French community in Malaysia.

Bidar began by sharing his personal journey as a Muslim growing up in France, a country known for its strong secular values. Much of his pluralistic worldview was shaped by his Muslim-converted mother, adoptive Moroccan father, and atheist grandfather, as well as his early interactions as a schoolboy in an elite private school. He proceeded to argue that the presence of Muslims in France is not a threat, but an opportunity for Islam to contribute to French society, especially on spiritual questions that remain unanswered by secularism. Central to Bidar's philosophy is the concept of 'self-Islam', in which humanity