

Collective action can turn around desperate situations

By Tan Sri Razali Ismail

DIVIDED WORLD: A common quest for moderation between the UN and Malaysia

UNITED Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrives in Kuala Lumpur today and leaves tomorrow. Not many UN secretary-generals have come to Malaysia in all these years.

UN Secretary-generals mostly go to troubled spots, as they should, and to powerful governments, as they must. Ban is very welcome here; Malaysians are hugely interested in the UN and its issues.

The Global Movement of Moderates (GMM), which had its first international conference about two months ago and is in the process of firming up its structure and programme, is honoured to be organising a public lecture tomorrow morning by the secretary-general with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations and the Razak School of Government.

Every effort will be made at the lecture to maximise exposure and deepen discussion, to emphasise how closely Malaysia and Malaysians follow the various activities of the UN, in support and in dissent. The organisers will stretch the limits to have the participation of non-governmental organisations and civil society, even if the lecture will be, unhappily, less than two hours.

The UN, even if more an assembly of states and governments, has its lifeblood in the support and participation of NGOs, well over 3000 organisations impacting on the various bodies of the United Nations.

The subject of the lecture will be UN and Malaysia in a changing world.

This secretary-general, going into his second five-year term, will be expected to deliberate on this, given a divided, troubled and unjust world and considerable negative perceptions held by Malaysians on the delivery capacity and efficacy of the UN.

The GMM, taking the necessary first steps, advocating the pursuit and application of what constitutes global moderation, will try to use the lecture to acquaint Ban with how Malaysia regards moderation and its many facets, and our programme to diffuse and temper extremism.

GMM needs the help of the UN as we widen the debate, to find an international constituency with groups of similar vocation.

Global moderation is necessary on all critical and seemingly intractable issues, politics, security, environment and global economics.

Moderation is embedded in the template of the UN Charter as much as in the positive achievements of Asean that eschew inter-state conflicts, emphasising reconciliation and a narrowing of the economic gap.

A shining example is what is happening in Myanmar where, inexplicably, a flawed constitutional process that could go all wrong has been rescued from the brink and all parties, including the military and that indomitable lady Aung San Suu Kyi, are now working together to bring change and reconstruction to that country, heralding much promise for our region.

These and other examples must be harnessed to underline that moderation as a means and as an end is doable, and can prevail when a critical collective group sues for equity, fairness and justice.

In history, it is this ability to turn around desperate situations and to phase in reconstruction and reconciliation that has allowed civilisation to flourish.

Many failed to understand the genesis of civilisation as one concurrent with the rise in the philosophy and practice of moderation.