The discussion was organised as a platform for sharing and eliciting input on the universal values present across the many religious celebrations in multi-religious Malaysia. This was done in the context of legislating policies under the newly introduced Transformasi Negara 2050, also known as TN50. TN50 is an initiative for the future of Malaysia. Beginning with the vision of becoming a developed nation, TN50 will strive to make Malaysia one of the top countries in the world in not just economic terms, but also for citizen well-being and innovation. The discussion was officiated by Datuk Dr. Anis Yusal Yusoff, followed by a brief introduction to TN50 by Mr. Nor Kamarul bin Norzam, a representative from the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS). The event proceeded with a special address by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar.

Presentations included: “The religious authority of each religion shared values ingrained in their main celebrations, namely Eid-Ul-Fitr and Eid-Ul-Adha,” presented by SS Datuk Dr. Zulkifli Mohamad al Bakri; “Chinese New Year,” presented by Dr. Yam Kah Kean; “Deepavali” by Prof. Datuk Dr. N.S. Rajendran; “Wesak Day,” by Prof. Dr. Ong Puay Liu; “Christmas,” by Dato’ Anthony Reynold Peters; and “Vaisakhi,” by Assoc. Prof. Madya Dr. Sarjit Singh al-Darshan Singh.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Chandra added that we need to feel furious and ashamed of something that goes against our culture, as many civilisations have fallen due to the absence of integrity in their leadership. Living in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysia, differences have to be understood and respected. Religious values are one of the keys to serving this purpose.

**Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS) Malaysia Convention**

**(Putrajaya, 4-5 March 2017)**

Tengku Ahmad Hazri

For more than a decade, the Reviving the Islamic Spirit Convention (RIS) has been an annual Islamic event held in Canada, initially to address the challenges of Muslim minorities living in the West. The convention provides a platform for spiritual reflection through lectures by leading Islamic scholars, networking and interaction among Muslims globally. This year marked a new chapter in RIS history, as it made its first appearance outside Canada, in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

RIS Malaysia 2017 featured several distinguished scholars, such as Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Dr Afifi al-Akiti, Dr Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, Shaykh
Muhammad Ninowy, Imam Afroz Ali and Imam Zaid Shakir, among others. It also included musical performances, exhibitions and a special award presentation, the Al-Ghazali Lifetime Achievement Award, this year given to Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in “celebration of his lifetime achievement and contributions to Islam.” Hamza Yusuf, in presenting the award to the representative of al-Attas, Prof Wan Mohd Nor, highlighted al-Attas’ unique contribution to a domain rarely discussed these days, namely metaphysics, the science of first principles, and his retrieval and reformulation of the concept of *adab* as foundational to Islamic thought and civilisation.

The lectures during the three-day convention revolved around four principal themes: (1) Islamic spirituality and ethics; (2) Islamic tradition and scholarship; (3) Islamic and Muslim identity; and (4) extremism and violence.

Spirituality and ethics constituted the core theme of the convention, a recurrent leitmotif that underscores virtually all matters of concern in the Muslim world today, from interpersonal relationships, interfaith relations and the family, to the questions of religious-intellectual authority and extremism.

One speaker noted a distinction in traditional Islamic spirituality between two types of vision—sensory (*basr*) and spiritual (*basirah*). A refined spiritual state gives one a capacity to see things with spiritual insight (*basirah*) in order to understand the deeper wisdom and significance behind things. In suffering, for example, *basr* only sees the hardship brought about by that suffering while *basirah* unlock the doors to optimism. As it unveils the meaning of suffering, *basirah* gives one an opportunity to improve and come closer to Allah. The speaker observed that this philosophy also informs many traditional Oriental arts. The Japanese art of pottery, for example, has an art/philosophy called *kintsugi* (or *kintsukoroi*), whereby to repair a broken object with lacquer or gold is to understand that its beauty lies precisely in its being broken, as an inseparable part of its history.

At the centre of these spiritual concerns is purification and perfection of the heart (*qalb*), which in traditional Islamic thought is the seat of knowledge and the faculty for spiritual discernment. Enriching one’s spiritual life involves cultivating personal relationships, especially in the family, calling for earnest endeavours to transform our “houses” into “homes”. The righteous caliphs provide an example par excellence towards this end, each of whom, as one speaker presented, represents one of the four cardinal virtues (*fada’il*) of Islamic ethics: justice, wisdom, courage and temperance.

On Islamic tradition and scholarship, a workable framework was found in al-Ghazali’s call to achieve four balances: reason and revelation (*’aql* and *naql*), outer and inner (*zahir* and *batin*, corresponding to two types of knowledge, *mu’amalat* and *mukashafat*), practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge, and
tradition of scholarship and tradition of the community one lives in. The latter is especially important in this age of global monoculture and mass homogenisation. Islamic law itself sanctifies tradition, with one legal maxim reading *al-‘adah muhakkamah* (established custom carries the weight of law). “Tradition is homage to the past,” noted Umar Faruq Abd-Allah. It is not sentimentalisation of the past but something meant to be lived in the present: “If the tradition does not put you in the present, leave it in the past.” For this reason, tradition must self-correct and self-rectify, containing within itself the ways of removing error and excess. The speakers further and emphatically counselled Malaysian Muslims to embrace the spirit of Nusantara, which has allowed the development of a unique Muslim identity based on a distinctive culture, and which should be allowed to permeate the present (e.g. in mosque architecture).

The emphasis on tradition linked closely to the problem of extremism, for extremists in religion typically position themselves and their views in sharp contravention to tradition. Violent expressions of extremism have three principal causes: (1) geopolitical; (2) socio-psychological; and (3) ideological. The geopolitical factor has to be put at the forefront as violent extremism among Muslims is in no small part a desperate reaction to injustices inflicted by the neo-imperialist foreign policies of Western governments in places like Palestine, Syria, and elsewhere across the Muslim world. The socio-psychological dimension explains why seemingly ‘normal’ individuals become attracted to extremist causes, as their psychological profiles typically reveal a chequered past, including broken homes, dysfunctional families and traumatic childhoods. Such understanding could help design preventive policies and measures to counter the spread of extremism. And finally, the ideological dimension discloses how beliefs are rationalised within particular theological-ideological frameworks, transforming incoherent beliefs into systematic convictions, thereby bolstering the extremist cause.

**Seminar on Zakat, Waqf and Sadaqah 2017: Empowering Social Benefit Initiatives Through Engagement of IFIs** *(Kuala Lumpur, 19 April 2017)*

*Apnizan Abdullah*

Over the last four decades, there has been a debate among Islamic scholars and economists about the need for Islamic financial institutions to actively participate in the social welfare sector if they are to claim to be in line with the principles of *maqasid al-shariah*. The proponents of Chapra’s model have argued that Islamic