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CONTENTS

• Editor's Desk

- Agree To Disagree

1

• Reflection

- Between Hadhramaut and Kuala Lumpur: When Identity Rediscovered Itself

2

• Current Affairs

- Malaysia Humanitarian Assistance To Somalia
- The Humanitarian Crisis In Gaza
- Reclaiming the Muslim Narrative: TikTok's Disruption of Islamophobia and the Urgency of Media Sovereignty

5

9

16

• Event

22



Centre for Islamisation (CENTRIS)

Level 3 Administration Building
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Jalan Gombak 53100 Kuala Lumpur
Email: zahidzamri@iium.edu.my/
centris_reception@iium.edu.my
Phone: (+603) 6421 6797

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EDITORIAL



Director: Dato' Hamidon Abd Hamid
Editor: Dr. Zahid Zamri
Co-editor: Dr. Nur Jannah Hassan
Graphic Designer:
Sr. Saidatunnisa' Zainuddin
Sr. Aisyah Natasya Mohd Zaharami

AGREE TO DISAGREE

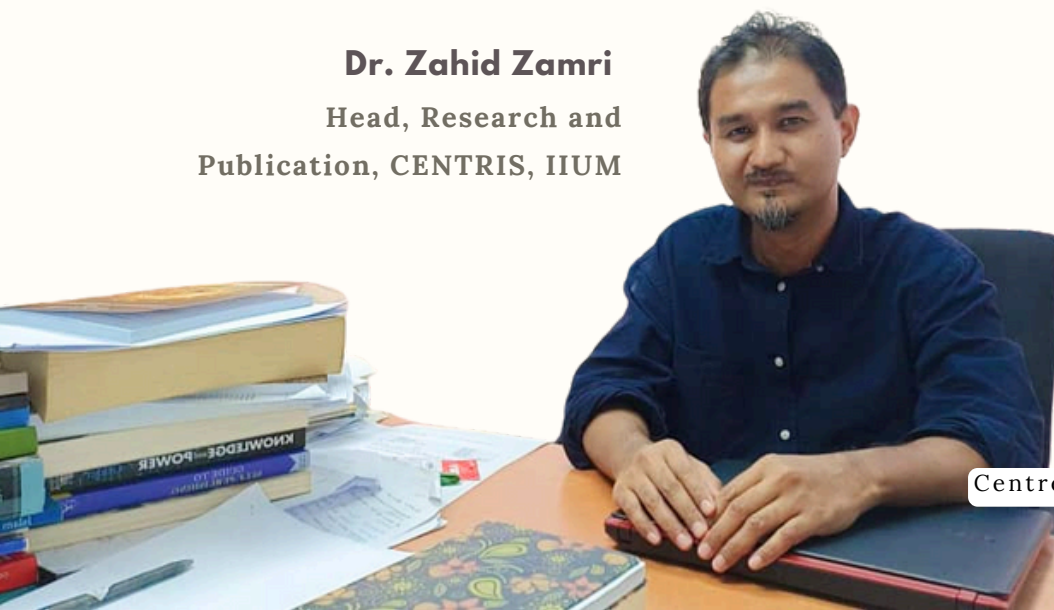
It is said that Voltaire once said: “*I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.*” This phrase encapsulates freedom of speech as a concept that should be defended even though we may not agree with the stance of the person who tries to voice out his/her thoughts. Such a radical democratic approach that allows freedom of speech will be able to avoid displeasure and vengeance that can lead to bloody conflicts because of constant suppression of the public sphere.

What is more, to have different opinions is a blessing. Around 2350 years ago, Aristotle, in outlining polity as the best governmental system, stressed that only through criticism can we move forward – which later became the foundation of modern science. According to him, if we do not allow criticism to take place, then we will always be at the status quo. Worst, for Karl Popper, the state will become a police state that will always monitor and punish those who try to criticize the authority. Winston Churchill in WW2, when the Nazis were approaching, had prevented the opposition leader from stepping down from the parliamentary seat as Churchill realized that he needed a person who could really criticize him so he could ensure that his ideas in saving the country had been thoroughly reviewed before they became war policies.

Nonetheless, there is a limit to such freedom of speech. Hate speech such as insulting, demeaning, belittling, cursing, sexist and racist remarks must not be allowed as these are against our moral and ethical principles. Again, on the flipside, failure to professionally deal with disagreement by forcefully dogmatically imposing our ideas on others is also not an accepted behaviour in Islam.

Dr. Zahid Zamri

Head, Research and
Publication, CENTRIS, IIUM





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