

ISNA Commends Malaysian Court Ruling that Affirms Religious Freedom of Christians

PRESS STATEMENT: The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

(Plainfield, IN – January 4, 2010) The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) commends the landmark ruling by a Malaysian Court on December 31, 2009, that affirms the religious freedom of Malaysian Christians. The ruling asserts that Christians have the right to use the word “Allah” to translate “God” into Bahasa Melayu, the Malaysian language. It strikes down a government ban that was placed in 2007 on the use of the term in Christian literature.

The opponents of the use of the word Allah in reference to God have argued that the term “God” is usually translated by Malaysians who follow faiths other than Islam as “Tuhan” in Bahasa Melayu, not “Allah.” They insist that “Allah” should only be used to refer to God in Islam. This argument is contrary to both Islamic understanding and practice.

The Qur’an is quite explicit that Muslims worship the same God recognized by Christians. The Qur’an commands Muslims to declare that the God they worship and the one worshiped by the followers of revealed books, including Christians, is one: “... and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.” (Qur’an 29:46)

With regards to actual and historical practices, Christian Arabs have been using the word “Allah” to refer to God in their religious sources since the inception of Islam, and have never been challenged by private Muslims or Muslim governments on this ground. Islamic law is clear that followers of the Christian faith have the right to practice their religion according to their own religious teachings.

Malaysia has long been a good example of Islamic tolerance and we call on the Malaysian government to maintain the tradition of tolerance and uphold the religious freedom of Christians and to let the court ruling stand. We also urge Muslim NGOs to respect Islamic teachings and long-held Islamic traditions, and to withdraw their opposition to the use of the word “Allah” by their Christian compatriots.

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