



Humanising Education
**The BOSNIAN
Experience**
in MALAYSIA

Edited by
Siti Aisqah Ibrahim Spahic

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IIUM
Press



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Foreword

By The Constitutional Head

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I am delighted to write this foreword for a book that records individual experiences of successful graduates of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) whose engagement in social, economic and political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of education imparted at IIUM. The University is based on the principles laid down in the Quran and the *Sunnah* with English and Arabic as the medium of instruction which promotes its global perspective. Almost all the countries of the world are represented in its student population.

The IIUM has the vision of restoring the dynamic and progressive role of the Muslim *ummah* in all branches of knowledge. The IIUM brings students of all cultures together and showcases the power of the faith in Almighty Allah and inspiring the believers to do the righteous deeds for the benefit of humanity. This book records how the alumni of Bosnia and Herzegovina bear the burden of righting the wrong and helping develop the society.

This is more than a book. It is a tale of friendship and a story of togetherness. It is homage to the power of pursuing knowledge as a community, and the ways and manners that allow the graduates of the IIUM to connect, share and look forward. The IIUM buzzes with students of all cultures laughing, praying and pursuing knowledge to help develop their own societies. As several essays in this book reveal, the students of Bosnia and Herzegovina found themselves in a melting pot of cultures and personalities, who had roots in about more than 100 countries. They felt joy in their company, and they left counting the days to re-visit their alma mater.

The University, from its very inception, has been integrating projects, alumni mentoring, research, community engagement and cross-cultural exchanges with classroom experiences. This programme fosters critical thinking,

effective communication, creativity, teamwork, a strong spiritual and ethical framework, and the resilience and persistence to help societies develop. This is what students need to thrive in today's complex, ever-changing world and this has been well exemplified by IIUM alumni from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The University has been innovative and adaptable, integrating hands-on learning experiences, and exposing students to the technologies that gave the graduates an edge over others. Not well known to many, the University gave the opportunity to students to do major in one field but add a second major in another, thus preparing them to face world challenges better. The alumni of Bosnia and Herzegovina represent a continuum of countless brilliant, morally upright and accomplished alumni whose records are archived in their communities.

The University, *Insha-Allah*, will continue to work innovatively and much more effectively in helping students to graduate from this garden of knowledge and virtue, to change the world for the better. I appreciate the efforts of the editor and contributors of this publication for documenting the achievements of the IIUM and its alumni. I look forward to due recognition of the IIUM from the world community for its efforts in redefining international education for the future.

Her Majesty

Seri Paduka Baginda The Raja Permaisuri Agong

Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah binti

Almarhum al-Mutawakkil Alallah Sultan Iskandar Al-Haj

D.K., D.M.N., S.S.A.P., S.I.M.P., D.K. (Johor), S.P.M.J., D.K. (Brunei).

Constitutional Head, International Islamic University Malaysia

Foreword

A Warm Heart from Bosnia for a Far Land of the Malay Nation

By Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia

By the end of 20th century, Bosnia was not overly known to the world. Indeed, it was covertly hidden by the beauty of her face of Princess and her spirit of Islam. The unveiling of her face shocked the world and the bringing to light her spirit drew the attention of her brothers and friends around the world. Her coming out on the world stage was quite an event which highlighted the end of the 20th century as much as it had marked the beginning of it where the First World War started in Sarajevo in 1914. Once again, the Bosnian city of Sarajevo was recognised as the Jerusalem of Europe and the Muslims of Bosnia earned the title of the champions of freedom. No relevant activist for human rights could stay indifferent to the besieged Sarajevo, which lasted longer than the besiege of Stalingrad from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996 (1,425 days).

The Muslim World was stunned by the scenes of genocide against a tiny autochthon Muslim population in Europe. No Muslim cause in the 20th century united the whole Muslim World as the Bosnian cause. The world nations of Islam were competing with each other in extending their sympathy and aid in whatever way they could do. No one thought that the Malay nation of Islam from the far land of Southeast Asia, Malaysia, would be in the front line of the best brothers and the best friends of Bosnia. But they, the Malay Muslims, did so. They spare no effort to be one of the best brotherly hand, one of the best humanly hearts, one of the best friendly hosts for Bosnian students and refugees.

Since the occasion here are the Bosnian (Malaysian) students, I am honoured to have been giving the opportunity to extend my deepest and warmest gratitude to Malaysia for a historic contribution to the enlightening of the spirit and mind of the Bosnian youth who are now occupying prominent places in the Bosnian society and state, thanks to the Malaysian righteous hand and good

heart. It would take a long list of names of good people of Malaysia from the government and university officials to the common people who helped the Bosnian students to achieve their educational goal and their career success in their country as well as who helped the Bosnian refugees to find the safe haven from the persecution of war. Out of fear that we might miss someone who deserves our deep gratitude, we would like to ask them to forgive us for not thanking each and every one by his/her name but to say to all of them from the bottom of our heart one big
THANK YOU - TERIMA KASIH (ترميا كاسيه) Malaysia!

As to my fellow Bosnian students of whom I am very proud, I would like to tell them that they should be grateful to Malaysia not in the way of feeling to owe anything to anyone but in the way to extend their righteous Bosnian hand and their good Bosnian heart to the others who might need their help as our Malay brothers and friends have been righteous and good to us from a far land with a warm heart.

If anything, Malaysia is a telling proof that the furthest distance is not a hindrance for the warm hearts to be closest in love and respect.

May Allah Almighty bless Malaysia!

Mustafa Ceric, PhD.

Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia

Foreword

By The Rector of IIUM

I have been to Bosnia a number of times before in the effort to forge relationship with universities in Sarajevo. The experience was generally a pleasant and memorable one. Not only in terms of academic collaboration and understanding but also from a historic-cultural perspective. Bosnia then had just recovered from a bloody war experience that left several indelible marks on its physical surroundings as well as on its psychic. Bosnia was almost at a brink of destruction, but managed to miraculously bounce back out of sheer tenacity and the commitment to defend its sovereignty come what may. We left the country full of admiration and lessons learnt as to how fragile a nation can be if the citizens are divided, a case that resonates well to our country, Malaysia.

It was not until 2019, that I had a chance to visit Bosnia again following an invitation to speak at the iconic Sarajevo Business Forum (SBF) then. This time I wore a different hat, as the sixth Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It was barely a year since I took office in July 2018. The invitation came from one notable Amer Bukvic, the leader of SBF and also an alumnus of IIUM. I thought this was a sheer coincidence but was grossly mistaken. This I found out while attending the Forum and interacting with many more Bosnian brothers and sisters there. Soon I realised that virtually all of them had some sort of relationship with IIUM. The memories that I had from previous visits gave way to different perspectives built around what “internationalisation” is in the context of education. This was affirmed as I shared my “new” thoughts with other luminaries during the remaining days of the Forum.

On coming back home to Malaysia, I immediately sought an appointment with His Excellency the Bosnian Ambassador to Malaysia, who is also an alumnus of IIUM. This cannot be a coincident anymore which led me to suggest the making of this volume. It is intended to be a testimony of what IIUM is to the Bosnians and vice-versa while they were studying at the Garden of Knowledge and Virtue. It has been almost three decades now since

the war in Bosnia broke out in the early 1990s. At least a generation has gone by and it is long enough a period to recall and reflect on the past experiences from various angles and aspects so that it could be better understood, analysed and gleaned from in the search for deeper meaning and interconnectedness in building a better future.

It was precisely with this in mind that I suggested to His Excellency the Bosnian Ambassador in mounting the book project, compiling the writings and thoughts of who's who coming from the IIUM Bosnian fraternity. I am made to understand that there are many of them, and the Ambassador confirmed this when he unanimously agreed to support the project. It will be opened to all IIUM alumni from Bosnia who are keen to take part in this first-time unique programme. It is aimed to clarify three major issues: (a) the experiences at IIUM during the period of stay, (b) what was singularly learnt or striking, and (c) what significant change was brought to the home country, Bosnia. Obviously, there are more that could be shared, but the basic idea is to gauge what is the role of education in general to affect “internationalisation” (within the understanding of IIUM). And more specifically, how does it “humanise education.” Both these ideas are central to the *raison d'être* of the University which may be able to help more effectively in defining the experiences that students, from other countries in particular, during their period of stay in IIUM in time to come.

The idea of this book is therefore to inspire the same among alumni from other countries. And in this case, it is Indonesia where two titles are now being published. To this end, I am made to understand that a couple of other countries are contemplating to do the same. Collectively, all these first-hand experiences are platforms to provide a richer documentation that not many universities are able to replicate. Indeed, this book hopes to further push the idea of “internationalisation” as an effort to rebuild one's own nation of origin, rather of the host nation, when the alumni decide and give back like the Bosnians have ably exemplified. In fact, Bosnia and Herzegovina could be one of the convincing models based on my initial observations. Thus the tagline “humanising education” that IIUM has adopted to advance further the cause of “internationalisation” by embracing *rahmatan lil alamin*. It may be just what is needed as IIUM grapples with new and larger issues ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic!

As a parting note, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in making this book a success. In particular, His Excellency the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Malaysia who unhesitatingly lent his support to do the book, more so to take keen interest in its progress from time to time. I am also grateful to the President of IIUM Alumni Chapter of Bosnia for her commitment towards this project. So too the Alumni Relations Division at IIUM in owning this project and ensuring its fruition despite the difficult time of the coronavirus disruptions. To the IIUM Press, we acknowledge the effort to complete this publication as part of the IIUM contribution to Kuala Lumpur World Book Capital 2020 agenda.

Last but by no means the least, the University's foremost gratitude and utmost thank you to Her Majesty the IIUM Constitutional Head for not only graciously penning the Foreword, but equally significant in officially launching the title on September 30th, 2020. May Allah SWT bless Her Majesty's kind gestures and efforts in taking IIUM to greater heights in its services to realise a better and just world moving forward.

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak

Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dato'

Rector, International Islamic University Malaysia

28 September 2020



Preface

Before the year 1992, I had not heard of the country named Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then in April 1992, the media started to report about a war that had erupted there. The ethnically rooted war was between the three ethnic groups – Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats that lasted until December 1995, killing around 100,000 people and displacing around 2.2 million people. The biggest victims were Bosniaks. Thus, the war is also said to be an aggression against them and the country. The war is said to be the most devastating conflict in Europe after World War II.

As the world mourned over the tragedy, the Malaysian government was among the first countries to provide an emergency relief response by taking in refugees. Young Bosnians were offered to study at the International Islamic University Malaysia. It continued even after the end of the war with the hope that these young people will return to help rebuild their country. Fast forward 25 years, they have returned to Bosnia and are holding good positions in their community. They are playing significant roles in rebuilding their country.

Humanising Education: The Bosnian Experience in Malaysia is a collection of stories and reflections by many Bosnians who have studied at the International Islamic University Malaysia during and after the war. It is a compilation of personal narratives of how they learned to adjust themselves not only to a very different climate and environment but also the culture; how they struggle with fulfilling their responsibilities as students all the while not knowing how their family and friends are doing back in their war-torn home. It is also stories of their journey to expand their horizons and forge a lasting friendship and network with fellow students not only from Malaysia but also from all over the world. As of 2020, IIUM has produced 100,000 alumni from 125 countries. From Bosnia there are 335 alumni.

Though these are reflections of personal experiences, other alumni who read this book will undoubtedly be transported back to their time in IIUM, reminiscing their own memories, like myself. They will find themselves back in the classrooms, *mahallahs* (hostel), the library, the canteens, all those late

nights spent completing assignments, last minute revisions for exams and the bitter-sweet memories of graduating together and parting ways.

On the other hand, non-alumni will be able to discover the lives of IIUM students through generations. The pain of leaving one's home and family behind only to make a new home in IIUM: "home away from home". The warm stories of brotherhood and sisterhood built with students from all around the globe through encounters in and out of classrooms.

This book serves as an excellent source of motivation for today's youth who are going through their own personal struggles with their studies and transition into adulthood. It paints a meaningful picture of the ups and downs of the beautiful journey called life; a true testament of the verse, "Indeed, with every hardship comes ease" (94:6).

IIUM's vision is to provide education that will shape holistic world citizens who will make a difference by contributing to the improvement of not only themselves and their families, but as well their communities and beyond. That is reflected in the size and global character of the University's alumni population and their diverse contributions. Bringing IIUM to the world, our alumni are the University's unofficial ambassadors of hope, advocating IIUM's core values. On the same note, IIUM Alumni Relations Division acts as a bridge between the University and its alumni; effectively advocating, communicating and engaging the latter's involvement in the development of their alma mater and its future alumni.

As such, we hope to get the readers' support in our quest to promote the idea of Humanizing Education which is priceless in getting an education that will shape students to be socially responsible citizens and to contribute towards a sustainable development of the world. We are in this quest for a better sustainable world together. After all, it takes a village to raise a child! Come and join us!

Siti Aisyah Ibrahim Spahic
Alumni Relations Division
International Islamic University Malaysia

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Studying at the International Islamic University Malaysia: Experiences of the Bosnian Alumni

Board Members, IIUM Alumni
Chapter 2018-2020

Historical circumstances prevailing in eastern Europe at the end of the 20th century - primarily the collapse of the “iron curtain” - and the dissolution of the international system characterised by “cold war” engendered a rapid political change in this part of Europe that was unseen since the end of World War Two (WW2). These international circumstances led to the collapse of multi-national states, former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and then Yugoslavia. The latter’s dissolution took the bloodiest trajectory.

Long simmering economic crisis coupled with distrust between various Yugoslav republics’ leaderships and rising tide of ethnic tensions, which later developed into extreme ethnic nationalism, led to hegemonic aspirations of Serbia, the largest Yugoslav republic to dominate the rest, produced the most catastrophic outcome for multi-ethnic and Muslim majority Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most central republic which became the target of two rival ultra nationalism, Serbian and Croatian, both bent on carving up this vibrant and tolerant country between themselves, according to already attempted historical scenario during the WW2.

It took an enormous effort for a newly elected democratic leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Presidency of Alija Izetbegovic to put its message across to the international community and galvanise the world’s conscience to stop the aggression and help restore peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Malaysia was among the first countries that stood up against the gross violations of human rights and openly supported the Bosnian struggle for freedom and dignity. Bosnia and Herzegovina came to occupy a central place in Malaysia’s foreign policy considerations for a number of reasons, but primarily so due to Malaysian opposition to human rights violations of the Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), especially in light of the fact that major Western powers were unwilling to take a firm position against the aggression until very late in the war.

Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, Malaysian prime minister at the time, became one of the most vocal international voices that expressed stern criticism of the Western World that let Bosnia descend into bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and destruction of life and religious and cultural heritage. Malaysia's position on Bosnia was primarily motivated by human rights concerns, upholding the principles of international law and firm opposition to oppression of the Bosnian Muslims. Therefore, Malaysia made a major contribution to the Bosnian cause in a number of concrete and practical ways, which produced clear and measurable short-term and long-term outcomes. Malaysian support of Bosnia and Herzegovina spanned dynamic activism spanning from diplomatic support in international forums - especially the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), engaging in peace-keeping missions on the ground, under the auspices of the United Nations, as well as by supporting the establishment of International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which eventually brought the perpetrators of war crimes and other atrocities and genocide to justice.

Apart from humanitarian aid and other immediate measures which Malaysia took to ease the suffering of the Bosnian Muslims, arguably, the most pivotal moment was the decision of Malaysian government to provide a large number of scholarships to a selected number of Bosnian students to study at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) that produced the most effective long-term impact on Bosnia's social, economic and political future. This decision also enabled the forging of long-term friendly and brotherly relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Malaysia. Whilst the assistance of various other Muslim countries to the Bosnian Muslims' cause is also significant and much appreciated, it was this Malaysian strategic vision and focus on education and long-term prospects for Bosnia and Herzegovina that generated the most effective outcome. This coupled with other factors, enabled Bosnia and Herzegovina to chart its future path as a vibrant, pluralistic, dynamic and responsible member of the international community of nations in the future.

This publication chronicle individual experiences of some of the most successful Bosnian IIUM alumni whose engagement in social, economic and political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly demonstrates the essence and core values, and justifies this long-term vision and foresight of the Malaysian political leadership at the time, when it comes to envisioning best transformational effects and impact an education can produce to transform

a given country or a society whilst simultaneously forging deep and lasting constructive ties between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Malaysia in long term.

Bosnia's IIUM alumni network is arguably one of the most prominent such examples, outside of Malaysia which demonstrates how long-term vision, strategic planning and forward thinking can be effectively employed in the service of economic, social and political development of a given country, by way of providing right education, networking, extra-curricular activities and cultural exchanges while forging both institutional and personal (informal) ties among the alumni and their counterparts in Malaysia.

Emergence of the Bosnian Muslim student community in Malaysia during the early nineties has so far not been given adequate and detailed scholarly appraisal in a separate and in-depth scholarly study or a thesis. It goes without saying that this phenomenon warrants close and serious attention. So far, there seems to exist only disparate and scattered information in some Bosnian journalistic publications about this topic. The only existing scholarly work which addressed this phenomenon we came across was a short and well-written and documented essay by Hamza Karcic, Bosnian political scientist from the University of Sarajevo, who dedicated his attention to investigating the Bosnian student community as part of his broader and more inclusive approach in which he chronicled lives and experiences of a broad range of Bosnians in Malaysia who arrived as refugees, including business professionals, concentration camps survivors and their families, as well as students who arrived in Malaysia during the Bosnian war, in late 1992 and early 1993.

According to Karcic, this small but diverse and temporary community of Bosnians gradually began to disperse after the war had ended. Karcic chronicled several hundred Bosnian Muslims who lived in Malaysia at the time. He noted in his essay published in 2014 that he was struggling to find any published work concerning life experiences and memories by any member of the Bosnians community in Malaysia that had been told in a structured and formal way so as to enable gaining a proper insight and providing ground for further research on the subject. Karcic attributes the influx of Bosnians to Malaysia largely to Malaysia's then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and his government, whom he described as a "maverick politician" who embraced the Bosnian cause with such vigour and empathy that made him emerge as global champion of the Bosnian Muslims' plight, especially in the Muslim world. During Dr. Mahathir's

tenure as prime minister in the 1990s 'Bosnia and Herzegovina came to occupy centre stage in Malaysian foreign policy because of Mahathir's own impassioned approach to the subject'. Karcic argued that Mahathir's vocal support for Bosnia helped promote Malaysia as human rights leader in the Muslim world. It is also important to emphasise, as Karcic argued, that Malaysia's activist foreign policy towards Bosnia was a non-partisan issue since Malaysian parliamentary opposition also joined hands with the government when Malaysia voiced open criticism of the Western policy inaction in relation to protecting human rights and upholding the principles of international law, concerning Bosnia's already recognised sovereignty.

Malaysian firm and resolute stand for justice was noticed as a role model and a leading example when Bosnian government leaders appealed to other Muslim states members of the OIC to follow Malaysia's lead and moral example of supporting Bosnia's just cause. Major short-coming of existing written material on the Bosnian IIUM alumni network is a reductionist approach and an assumption and unjustified claim that the majority of its members have become associated with the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS), a non-government and non-profit intellectual think tank, closely associated with International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). In light of the above mentioned shortage of published work on both the importance and nature of Bosnian IIUM alumni in the public domain, this publication is therefore much needed original and authentic contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this area. Furthermore, this monograph will also serve as an objective, dispassionate and unbiased appraisal of real people and their first hand experience with IIUM and the knowledge they gained at this esteemed international advanced centre of academic learning. It will give insight into how extrapolation of that knowledge and its practical implementation in a multitude of areas ranging from private enterprise, government, diplomacy, social work, religious studies, finance and banking, media and other facets of social, political and economic life impacted upon Bosnia and Herzegovina and its standing.

There is no doubt that over two hundred successful Bosnian professionals who constitute the IIUM Bosnian alumni association today is an intellectual, business, political, financial, academic, media, and business elite, and a formidable force to be reckoned with. If united and well-organised, it has the capacity to spearhead economic, political and social development and could have serious transformational effect on the Bosnian society in a most profound,

constructive and positive way. Being aware of formidable strength and potent capability of the Bosnian IIUM alumni network that strong ties with Malaysia, and represents a solid glue that binds together Bosnia and Malaysia,

Bosnian IIUM alumni realised the importance of creating an engaged, activist and supportive alumni network, and how crucial it is to their own professional success and success of their country, as well as the success and reputation of the very university that nurtured and shaped their academic outlook and worldview. Bosnian IIUM alumni realised that education did not stop with graduation ceremony or attainment of lucrative corporate or public job after graduation. There is a need to be a steady flow of communication between university and its alumni so they are timely kept engaged and informed on the development of their university. Bosnia and Herzegovina IIUM alumni can be described as activist, engaging and aware of the need to remain interconnected among themselves, and in contact with their university. The IIUM Bosnian alumni are proud to be represented on the Board of IIUM.

Currently, there are not many Bosnian students enrolled in a study at the IIUM, as opposed to their number in the past. This is due to stabilisation of political situation in Bosnia, opening of a number of private universities within Bosnia, but also due to existence of ample opportunities to study abroad, and yet closer to home, at European universities. Despite this, the IIUM Bosnian alumni remain active supporter of IIUM as it is closely linked, on an emotional level, with their alma mater, and it remains loyal supporter. In fact, IIUM Bosnian alumni are perhaps the best ambassadors of Malaysia in Bosnia and Herzegovina and further afield. Equally, through their network, affiliations and personal ties they are also ambassadors of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Malaysia. They can serve as interlocutors in building trust, confidence, business connections, cultural understanding and trade and diplomatic relations beyond official government channels. Diplomatic activity, although officially still the prerogative of states that conducts bilateral relations with each other, informal ties known in the world as ‘Track 2 diplomacy’, are increasingly becoming important part of overall relations among nations, especially in the field of education, culture, sports, tourism and other areas. In addition, IIUM Bosnian alumni acts as best marketing practitioners who promote their university through their own personal and professional networks, the fact so far still highly under appreciated.

“The Bosnia Association of Alumni of International Islamic University Malaysia” is an NGO and was officially registered by its members in 2004. It

brings together over 200 IIUM graduates from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighbouring countries such as Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, who agreed with the statute and goals of the Association and who demonstrated their willingness to support the Association's activities.

The Alumni Association is governed by its constitution and in a democratic way. It has its assembly - the highest authority of the Association. The Assembly defines the statute and sets the strategic planning and general goals of the organization. Bosnian IIUM Alumni has its management board that reports to the assembly on an annual basis. Management Board has nine elected members to a two year-2 term. President of the board officially represents the association. The board manages day-to-day activities and implements all strategic decisions to fulfill association's objectives.

Assembly and president of the management board can recommend persons from without the organisation as honorary members under the condition that they have given a special contribution to the Alumni. Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia is an honorary member of the Association, along with Dr. Mustafa Cerić, Former Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Mrs. Azra Cerić, his wife; Dr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Former Prime Minister of Turkey, as well as Dr. Fikret Karčić, professor at the University in Sarajevo.

Alumni promotes the values of IIUM as its core objective and uphold other values and philosophy that underpin it, such as a belief that whatever members do, constitutes *ibadah* and *amanah* as ordered by the Creator. In addition, the Association promotes strengthening interpersonal relations and networking among its members. Striving to give contribution to an overall development of Bosnia is regarded as an important tenet of the association. Alumni also provides support for Bosnian students currently enrolled at IIUM and are actively engaged in social and academic developments and dialogue in Bosnia. It also vigorously promotes bilateral relations between Malaysia and Bosnia through its numerous projects and activities.

Since its founding, 15 years ago, the Association has been active in humanitarian work, offering help to those in dire needs, from raising financial aid for the Tsunami victims in Indonesia in 2004/05, supporting a family of a deceased member of the Association in 2018. The list of many humanitarian actions carried out by Bosnian IIUM Alumni is fairly long. Apart from impromptu humanitarian and fund-raising activities, two permanent projects

make the Association permanently engaged in charitable work. First, the Association regularly provides scholarships for pupils of primary schools in and around the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, on an annual basis. Second, it purchases and distributes *Qurbans*, also in the region of Srebrenica. The Association could be described as scholarship-sensitive for two reasons. First, it is due to the fact that most of its members used to be scholarship recipients, so it is particularly close to their hearts. Second, it highly values and recognises the importance of education. The reason why the Alumni supported children's education and general improvement of the well-being of Srebrenica returnees is because this Bosnian region suffered genocide and an attempted extermination on the part of the aggressor, hence assigning scholarships to survivors of genocide, and for the pupils in dire need is of utmost priority for the Association.

Usually a scholarship amounts to 500 BAM and it is distributed in two-to-three instalments during the school year. It is worth noting, however, that various other institutions and Alumni's partner organisations support the programme as well. They range from Muslim Aid, Bosna Bank International, Malaysian Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to name only a few contributors. It goes without saying, though, that the Alumni members finance the largest portion of scholarships themselves. So far the Alumni has provided on average more than 50 scholarships annually.

As far as *Qurban* project is concerned, for the past few years the Alumni organised and executed the annual *Qurban* in the municipal region of Srebrenica. All logistical activities required for carrying out this project were conducted by the Association's hard working team, comprising many members who have been directly involved on the field. *Qurban* project yields a multitude of practical effects for the well-being of the regional Muslim returnee population. First, livestock (usually sheep but also cattle) are purchased from local farmers. For most of them, *Qurban* annual sales constitute a major source of their household income. Second, distribution of *Qurban* meat directly to the people of Srebrenica and surrounding villages provides much-needed source of their protein intake. Third, this project provides financial award for local butchers and their helpers, whilst donation of animal skin also contributes to the economic improvement of the area.

Apart from the above listed charitable activities, the Alumni frequently organise events aimed at strengthening the Alumni and further develop its

networks and relationships. One such example is regular hosting of annual *Iftar* dinners during the month of Ramadan. Annual family gatherings are also organised, as well as frequent lectures on different topics relevant to the overall aims of the Association. Alumni focus is to further consolidate itself so it can better utilise its rich potential so it could play an even more constructive and beneficial role in reviving and multiplying the Association's goals. It is worth noting that all types of engagement of members in the Management Board and the Alumni generally are solely based on voluntary basis (*fi sabilillah*). The Alumni is led by the principle that "Yours is just what you give".

The association is forward looking and it sees as one of its major challenges how best to attract attention of more of its members to increase the membership base and solidify the capacity of the Alumni so it can become engaged in a larger and more complex projects for the benefits of the community. This would undoubtedly ensure a continuation and strengthening of the Association and further extension of its core activities to venture into other areas as circumstances might require. The Alumni looks at broadening its humanitarian and academic and advocacy work so it can improve and enhance its positive impact upon the Bosnian society as well as on each and everyone individual.

Bosnian IIUM alumni are currently represented in all major fields of endeavour, ranging from management positions in corporate sector, public companies or expert jobs in all tiers of government bureaucracy, banking and financial sector, tourism, industry, education and academia at large, politics and diplomacy, religious organisations, media, small business, think tanks, humanitarian organisations, marketing companies etc. It is worth noting that IIUM alumni in Bosnia are in no way monolithic group of professionals nor do its members adhere to exclusive, ideological views on social issues, or hold same political and ideological perspectives such as their critics portray them to be, in a narrow and reductionist manner.

One fascinating example of the Bosnian IIUM alumni is their ability and willingness to organise fund raising events and programmes with the sole objective to raise funds for various social cause, particularly to generate scholarships for talented students of humble means who are in need of financial support and mentoring. This has been regular activity of the Bosnian IIUM alumni. In addition, the network as an established formal body, as well as its individual members on their own accord, have been proactive in offering

practical support and assistance in helping other colleagues secure jobs, or in assisting them in launching their own start-up businesses. In this way they give back to their community.

Malaysia Boleh characterised by self-help, resilience, self-confidence, inclusiveness and open door policy inspired alternative vision for Bosnia and Herzegovina both in the post-conflict period of reconstruction and creation of institutional structures and today in times of totally new and a different global health crisis. Without the experience of *Malaysia Boleh* which Bosnian IIUM alumni members experienced first hand during their study in Malaysia, initiatives such as *Bosnian Boleh*, Sarajevo business forum, Sarajevo Halal forum, Al Jazeera Balkans, rise of successful, dynamic and innovative corporate outfits, and especially the public-private partnership initiatives, would not be able to flourish in Bosnia - a small Balkan country in the heart of Europe – had it not been for the experience, inspiration, knowledge, confidence and lessons learned from Malaysia that Bosnian Alumni borrowed and successfully implanted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, it is Malaysian vibrant, pluralistic and multi-ethnic society and highly successful international university, coupled with Islam-based values of God-fearing, honesty, responsibility, hard work, self-reliance and collegiality, and community spirit (*Jema'ah*) the Bosnian alumni were imbued with during their study in Malaysia, that also enabled coexistence of diversity of political, programmatic, ideological and developmental views within one single IIUM alumni network.

If one is to search for a model example of such a large number of people, both men and women, with a multitude of professional careers and different political affiliations, which captures the spirit of IIUM and Malaysia and its developmental model based on Islamic values, tolerance, interfaith and interracial harmony, it should be the Bosnian IIUM alumni association. Its members come from different social back-grounds and have chosen different career paths and walks of life, with a varying degrees of religious zeal, or at least outwardly noticeable affiliation, and yet what unites them all as one, is their devotion to their homeland, traditional values, family and their admiration for Malaysia which nurtured them and provided them with shelter, safety, educational opportunity to learn and to grow, to develop as well as a profound sense of adventure to encounter people of different cultures and traditions, customs and ways of doing things. They all share their love and admiration for IIUM, the university that nurtured them and professors who imbued in them

values and spirit of success and desire to serve the community, their home land and the entire Muslim *ummah*.

Their exposure to lengthy periods of life in Malaysia taught them important values such as self respect, resilience, spirit of entrepreneurship, hard work, perseverance and ability to navigate student life in such a balanced way as to sacrifice temporary gratifications for future success and happiness. It is precisely through economic and human development that the IIUM alumni in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been trying to achieve a higher human goal. Hence, most of its members invested a great effort in promoting the potentials of their home land to international investors in order to create stable economic environment that would in return contribute to enduring peace and stability, increase international awareness, and ultimately transform a distorted image of Bosnia and the entire western Balkans from that a “powder keg” and a “place of conflict and ethnic discord” to a desirable destination favourable for doing business, developing tourism and a meeting point of different cultures and civilisations and a source of cultural enrichment.

Bosnian IIUM alumni played an important role in economic and social progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before Covid-19 pandemic Bosnia and Herzegovina witnessed an impressive influx of foreign tourists from all corners of the globe, including from Malaysia. Tourism sector saw increase by 30 percent. Apart from Europe, Sarajevo became connected via daily flights with Istanbul, Riyadh, Dubai, Doha and other major global hubs, many of which were initiated as a result of projects led by Bosnian IIUM alumni network, on platforms such as Sarajevo Business Forum and various other ventures.

Multitude of think tanks prevalent in Malaysia and early experience and exposure of Bosnian alumni of IIUM to an array of voluntary organisation in Malaysia, some of which have been influential, provided first hand experience to Bosnian students in Malaysia and taught them how to engage in activism, advocacy and various causes, primarily their struggle to galvanise support for Bosnian plight in the 1990s. Experience and energy gained from this period in Malaysia instilled confidence and know how to this Bosnian alumni and the result of this is their ability to be active across the range of organisational structure for the benefit of their country and society.

Alleviating poverty and saving disadvantages people from suffering and anguish of destitution is ultimately what some people can do more effectively than others. Altruism of Bosnian IIUM alumni is purely in line with their deep personal Malaysian experiences when they learned how to survive on modest scholarships, as well as their convictions inspired their allegiance to Islam, which is also somewhat aligned with the philosophy of 'effective altruism'. Experiences of personal sacrifice transcend their need for personal satisfaction or leisure. Rather than feeling satisfied alone they employ their vision, knowledge and networks in the community, and within alumni itself, to rally support for a range of effective causes to bring about tangible benefit to the largest number of beneficiaries possible, particularly among the less fortunate and vulnerable sections of society, providing them with opportunities where they themselves can learn, educate themselves and gain confidence, know-how and necessary base for unleashing their full potential in life. It is the long-term output and effect on people's lives that matter in ultimate analysis and evaluation of once altruistic endeavours. This is where IIUM alumni in Bosnia continue to lead the way, serving as role models for future generations of both successful entrepreneurs as well as effective altruists.

Hence, this civilisational and human aspect of international relations in which human exchanges contribute to better understanding, cohesion, tolerance and dialogue among nations, religions and cultures, has been neglected feature of international relations' theories and practice during past decades. In many instances, Bosnian IIIUM alumni have truly become international ambassadors to the institution that nurtured them in knowledge and wisdom. Highly engaged IIUM Bosnian alumni network can be equally beneficial to their university as an institution.

We could go on and cite hundreds of stellar examples of Bosnian IIUM alumni to illustrate the point that their theoretical and practical knowledge and experience gained in Malaysia benefited them personally in terms of improving their own lives and that of their families, and by extension their communities and work organisations in which they found satisfaction to work and thrive. It is suffice to say that illustrating only a few of them will serve as evidence that IIUM has become one of the most formidable and successful tertiary international institutions whose graduates within the past two or so decades have become spread all over the world, and all of them are immensely

successful, everyone of them in their own right, and in their field of endeavour, so that IIUM can be proud with both its effectiveness as well as global reach. Most importantly these Bosnian IIUM alumni have become harbinger of economic success, development as well as balance between material and this worldly benefits and everlasting benefit, which will follow hereafter. Most of them contributed great deal to uplifting their societies out of poverty and gave many a hope in a possibility of a better and more prosperous future.

Humanising Education

The BOSNIAN Experience

in MALAYSIA

The Bosnian experience in Malaysia is an anecdotal recollection and heartfelt reflections by IIUM Alumni from once war-torn Bosnia. The authors shared their memories in IIUM and reflected on how the knowledge and experience gained have helped them in scaling new heights in their chosen career.

The authors represented different periods spanning pre and post Bosnian war - a few came before the commencement of the war, some during the war, and others joined IIUM after the war ended. At the onset of this project, all have since left to serve their motherland in more ways than one. Falling back on the education gained in IIUM, their contributions to their home country Bosnia range from being teachers and educators; shaping young minds and building personalities, to being industrious corporate figures, cultivating and developing the economy of Bosnia to new heights.

This publication chronicles individual experiences of some of the many successful Bosnian IIUM alumni whose engagement in social, economic, and political existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina has irrevocably demonstrates the essence and core values needed to shape the country anew. When it comes to envisioning the best needed transformational effects and impacts of education in transforming a given country or a society, the long-term vision and foresight of the Malaysian political leadership then is thus correctly justified when the decision to facilitate the enrolments of our Bosnian brothers and sisters was made. This move has simultaneously forged deep and lasting constructive ties between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Malaysia.

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