

# ANWAR IBRAHIM

Global Justice and Peace  
Through Dialogue

With a Special Foreword by  
Professor Osman Bakar

*'Anwar Ibrahim: A Born Dialogical Leader'*

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**ANWAR IBRAHIM**  
**Global Justice and Peace Through  
Dialogue**

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*For youth and future leaders of Malaysia and  
the World.*



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# **SPECIAL FOREWORD:**

**Anwar Ibrahim: A Born Dialogical Leader**

**EMERITUS PROF. DATUK DR. OSMAN BAKAR**

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Many friends and supporters of Anwar Ibrahim consider him as a true born leader. Their perception of him as such a person is not without basis or justification. Since his school days he has been seen progressively displaying his leadership talent and qualities that have helped him rise to political stardom both at national and international levels. Anwar Ibrahim is now at the peak of his political power after winning the coveted post of Prime Minister of Malaysia in November 2022.

While still a student at the prestigious English boarding school, the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), dubbed the Eaton of the East, Anwar became a leader of the school's religious body, Badan Revolusi Agama

(Revolutionary Religious Body) and he caught the attention of fellow schoolmates as a skilful debater. The word 'revolutionary' in the name of the school's religious body, an unthinkable word in contemporary Malaysian educational culture and policy, provides an early hint of Anwar's reformist thinking on the issue of the interface of religion and social change for the betterment of society. The subsequent development in Anwar's thinking and social activism only went to confirm this early hint. Rather significantly, in the evolutionary expansion of Anwar's leadership traits one of the elements that remain constant is his commitment to social justice, particularly an apparently genuine and deep sympathy for the plight of the poor and disadvantaged groups in society.

Anwar's mastery of the art of public debate is another constant facet in his colourful life. His debating skill is put to good use in his colourful life. His debating skill is put to good use in his calculated attempt to cultivate a public image as a polished speaker who is well informed by ethical-moral values that are rooted in religious traditions. This aspect of his public image that first became visible when he was a youth leader in the 1970s helps

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characterise the brand of his leadership which he displays until now, including in Parliament.

Debates and dialogues may have distinctive differences, but they are not mutually exclusive. Both are forms of communication in which a speaker seeks to effectively persuade his listener(s) to his cause. In our contemporary world there is a movement towards a semantic convergence of debate and dialogue. There is a closer interrelation between these two forms of communication in terms of goals if not in methods. There is a blurring of boundaries between the two verbal activities. But without doubt, a common fundamental aim of both arts is to persuade others to embrace one's point of view, position, standpoint, or even cause. Anwar's power of persuasion is rather well-known. It proved to be a great asset to his political career.

Of the two arts, dialogue is generally viewed as nobler than debate by virtue of the former's nature to facilitate creation of new spaces for common grounds in ideas in the search for solutions to societal problems. In Anwar's case, it is quite clear that the dialogical approach dominates his brand of leadership. Even when he participates

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in debates, we could see him displaying tendencies in dialogical persuasion with the clear view of trying to arrive at a common ground among the participants. But Anwar's dialogical spirit that first manifested itself when he was a university student and youth leader is not simply the product of his learning from experiences. In my view, based on my acquaintance with his "natural talent" and rich personal experiences. The natural leadership talent in him was being enhanced by the many practical opportunities that were open to him in the various phases of his life. It is in this sense of one having natural tendencies in dialogical persuasion that I describe Anwar as a born dialogical leader.

Anwar is perhaps Malaysia's most well-known and most influential former student and youth leader. He was a former leader of the National Union of Muslim Students Association (PKPIM President, 1968-1971), Muslim Youth Movement Malaysia (ABIM President, 1974-1982), and the international youth organisation, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY, Asia Pacific Representative, 1976-1982). But he was not just a top leader of these influential Muslim organisations. He was also a leader of

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the national, multiethnic, and multireligious Malaysian Youth Council (MBM, Secretary General and President, 1971-1974) and the international Belgium-based World Assembly of Youth (WAY, Committee Member, 1973-1974). Additionally, he was a member of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group to the United Nations Secretary General on Youth Affairs (1973). All these different leading positions in youth leadership at both national and international levels are a clear testimony to his widely acknowledged accomplishments in leadership role. It seems certain that instrumental to his leadership accomplishment was his dialogical dynamism.

From the perspective of his present leadership as the Prime Minister of a Madani Unity Government that is reflective of Malaysia's demographic diversity, Anwar's experience as the President of the multiethnic and multireligious Malaysian Youth Council (MBM) may be described as an early anticipation of, or as good training for his future leadership role. In his capacity as the President of the Council he was confronted with the challenge of how to deal with ethnic and religious diversity of its constituent

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group members within the framework of national unity and common national aspirations. Anwar was able to discharge well his Presidential duty, earning praises and appreciations from non-Malay and non-Muslim members of the Council for his enlightened leadership, dialogical persuasive initiatives, and spirit of inclusiveness. For Anwar who aspired to climb the leadership ladder to higher positions in public office, the MBM presidential experience must have served as an appropriate practical training module for leadership of multicultural Malaysia. The ‘unofficial’ training is appropriate, because MBM may be viewed as a microcosm of the Malaysian nation.

Unfortunately, Anwar’s term as MBM’s President was cut short by his arrest in December 1974 during student protests in Baling, Kedah against rural poverty and hunger that led to his detention without trial for twenty-two months (January 1975–November 1976) under the Internal Security Act on the charge of being “a threat to national security.” The detention also cut short his leadership term in the World Assembly of Youth (WAY), to which he was appointed at about the same time. Both the national MBM leadership

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and the international WAY leadership in which he served as a committee member had promises of a brighter future leadership role and achievements waiting for him. But destiny had a different plan for his leadership training for his future national and international roles. Prison was to serve for him as another school for leadership education. One may argue on the precise substance of the leadership traits that he additionally acquired during his prison term. But it seems that there is one thing certain. Anwar appeared to his friends, supporters, and even critics as a more matured and wiser youth, intellectually and spiritually speaking, and as a more determined youth leader in pursuing his struggle against social injustices. Upon his release from prison in November 1976, at the age of twenty-nine, the greater part of the formative years of Anwar's leadership in what many observers see as an impressive and high-profile youth activism and even intellectualism had passed. These formative years included the almost two years of his prime life spent in prison. No one who understands the Quranic idea of human life as replete with trials from God, least of all Anwar, would consider the prison term, especially for a good cause, as wasted years. But

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the remaining part of his formative years as a youth leader was yet to unfold. According to the then Malaysian definition of youth, the age limit is forty years. Thus, in the post-imprisonment era he had eleven more years to further develop his youth leadership talents and expand the horizons of his leadership achievements before the chapter of his youth activism and leadership comes to an end. The unfolding occurred in two periods. The first period extended from the day one he was released from prison until March 1982 when he left ABIM to join UMNO as a Deputy Minister in Mahathir Mohamad's Cabinet. The second period started with Anwar's entry into active politics through UMNO and extended to the year 1987 when he turned forty and was appointed as Minister of Education, a strategic Ministry in Malaysian politics. The period 1982-1987 coincided with his leadership role as the head of UMNO Youth, a powerful and influential wing of the most powerful political party in the country that traditionally produced its Prime Ministers.

In the first period, there were three highlights in Anwar's leadership profile. First, he returned to the fold of ABIM leadership,

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strengthened his grip on the organisation, and thanks to his charismatic leadership that political imprisonment only helped to shine even further transformed ABIM into a formidable youth force wielding wide influence not only in Malaysia but also in the rest of the Malay-speaking world. Second, at the international level, Anwar magnified his role and presence in the leadership of WAMY, which helped to make him one of the most influential youth leaders in the Muslim world. Third, Anwar extended his leadership talent to a new domain of civil society activism, namely interfaith and intercultural dialogue. In subsequent years his dialogical leadership was to grow, expand, and shine to the point of it manifesting itself as one of the most visible aspects of his international leadership over the last three decades. His MBM leadership experience must have significantly helped him to navigate his post-imprisonment phase of dialogical leadership exploration.

In this period of Anwar's intense engagement with the ABIM and WAMY leadership as well, the dialogical spirit of mutual consultation (shura) that essentially defines Muslim democracy

must have left a deep impression on his thought. The Islamic theory and practice of democracy was seriously discussed by ABIM leaders during this period up to the time when Anwar left the movement to join the national political democratic process in March 1982. This phase of Anwar's leadership career needs to appear in any narrative on the evolution of his thought on democracy that claims to be reliable such as the one sought by Charles Allers in his *Anwar Ibrahim: Evolution of a Muslim Democrat* (2014).

It may be said that by the beginning of the 1980s Anwar must have felt that he had accomplished all the youth leadership goals that could be achieved by anyone of comparable personal worth and ability and that there was nothing else significant that was to be achieved by him by staying as a civil society (Masyarakat madani) leader. It was only in the political arena that remained for him to leave his distinguished leadership marks and trails. He succeeded in his new leadership initiatives and adventures in this political domain. Only months after joining UMNO he captured in a democratic party election the coveted post of Head of UMNO Youth, which

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he held until 1987. He had reached the age of forty, the maximum qualified age for office bearers in the political movement. However, in this political part of the last phase of his youth leadership adventures Anwar demonstrated that he could also excel in political leadership. As a newcomer to the Party, his first taste of political victory could only be described as impressive. The various distinctive traits of dialogical leadership that he had accumulated over the years when he was a young civil society leader, especially his strong knowledge-based persuasive powers and his spirit of inclusivism, have tremendously helped facilitate his navigation through the challenging political waters in UMNO.

After becoming the UMNO Youth leader Anwar's rise through the Party ranks until reaching the top echelon of the Party was relatively swift and impactful. As deputy to Mahathir in the Party and the government Anwar was for a while Prime Minister-in-waiting. But again, destiny had its own plan for Anwar's leadership career. As a result of deep differences with Mahathir, Anwar was removed from all posts by the latter. Twice he served jail sentences for sodomy, charges which have been confirmed as

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trumped up and politically driven, first (2000-2004) under the Mahathir and second (2015-2018) the Najib governments. However, Anwar finally succeeded in becoming Malaysia's Prime Minister, the tenth, when he was appointed to the post by the King. The Prime Ministership crowned Anwar's long history of leadership achievements. It tells a powerful message: dialogical leadership qualities may be a necessary personal asset to have to rise to the nation's top post in public office, but for Anwar these seem to be insufficient. His brand of leadership was to be tested with trials and sacrifices!

# PROLOGUE

In a world increasingly defined by its complexities and divisions, the quest for leaders who can navigate these challenges with wisdom and empathy is more crucial than ever. Anwar Ibrahim, the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, has emerged as a visionary leader whose commitment to dialogue and justice offers a beacon of hope amidst global uncertainties. This book, authored by Yusmadi Yusoff, a distinguished lawyer, former Senator, and Member of Parliament in Malaysia, delves into the remarkable journey of Anwar Ibrahim and his transformative impact on global dialogue.

Yusmadi Yusoff, Founder and Chairman of RIGHTS Foundation, brings a unique perspective to this exploration. His extensive experience as a lawyer, academic fellow, and public servant, combined with his distinguished academic accolades—including the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship, Democracy and Development Fellowship from Stanford University, and the Lee Kuan Yew Senior Fellow in Public Service—provides a profound understanding of leadership and governance. This book draws upon his insights

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to illustrate how Anwar Ibrahim's approach to dialogue has reshaped international discourse and promoted justice and peace on a global scale.

Anwar Ibrahim's leadership transcends conventional boundaries, reflecting a deep commitment to bridging divides and fostering understanding. His work extends from his early activism to his current role as a global statesman, consistently demonstrating how principled dialogue can address complex global issues. The chapters that follow offer a detailed examination of Anwar's contributions, including his efforts in establishing significant institutions like the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and his advocacy for justice in areas such as Palestine and Myanmar.

As we journey through Anwar Ibrahim's impactful career, this book highlights how his dedication to dialogue and justice serves as a model for contemporary leadership. His vision and actions remind us of the power of empathetic engagement in overcoming conflicts and building a more harmonious world. This book is not only a tribute to Anwar Ibrahim's achievements

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but also an invitation to embrace dialogue as a transformative force for global justice and peace.

In presenting this exploration, Yusmadi Yusoff hopes to inspire current and future leaders to follow in Anwar Ibrahim's footsteps, leveraging dialogue and understanding to address the pressing challenges of our time. The insights and lessons drawn from Anwar's life and work offer a compelling case for the potential of dialogue to effect meaningful change in our interconnected world.



# CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY YEARS

*"Dialogue is the bridge to understanding, and  
understanding is the path to peace."*

*– Anwar Ibrahim*

In an increasingly polarized world, the importance of dialogue cannot be overstated. It is through dialogue that we bridge gaps, build understanding, and foster peace. Anwar Ibrahim, the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, has been a relentless advocate of dialogue as a tool for achieving global justice and peace. This chapter explores the profound impact of dialogue in addressing the world's most pressing issues and sets the stage for understanding Anwar Ibrahim's unique approach to leadership.

## **The Essence of Dialogue**

Dialogue is more than just conversation; it is an exchange of ideas, a meeting of minds, and a process of mutual understanding. It requires empathy, respect, and a willingness to listen. In the

Anwar Ibrahim has been the focus of numerous biographies and scholarly investigations. Widely recognized as an eminent activist, distinguished intellectual, and magnetic statesman, his unwavering advocacy for justice culminating in a decade of incarceration, firmly established him as a pivotal figure in global affairs, reminiscent of Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Malcolm X.

This book captures Anwar's steadfast commitment to democratic liberties and human rights. Going beyond mere portrayals of the life of a prominent personality in contemporary world history, Yusmadi Yusoff imparts pragmatic insights for aspiring politicians, advocates, and catalysts of societal transformation. Riveting, enthralling, and motivating, this book is hard to put down once you start!

**Associate Professor Dr. Khairudin Aljunied,**  
*Senior Fellow Georgetown University*

In a world increasingly defined by its complexities and divisions, the quest for leaders who can navigate these challenges with wisdom and empathy is more crucial than ever. Anwar Ibrahim, the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, has emerged as a visionary leader whose commitment to dialogue and justice offers a beacon of hope amidst global uncertainties. This book, authored by Yusmadi Yusoff, a distinguished lawyer, former Senator, and Member of Parliament in Malaysia, delves into the remarkable journey of Anwar Ibrahim and his transformative impact on global dialogue.

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