

LAUNCHING SPEECH BY
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LAUNCHING OF THE MAB EXCELLENCE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS
FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS 2017/2018

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Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and Salam Sejahtera.

1. Saya bersyukur ke hadrat Allah S.W.T. kerana dengan limpah kurnia dan keizinan-Nya dapat kita bersama-sama berkumpul pada hari ini di majlis yang penuh bermakna ini.

2. Saya ingin mengucapkan jutaan terima kasih dan setinggi-tinggi penghargaan kepada pihak Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) yang telah menjemput saya ke majlis MAB Excellence Achievement Awards for the Blind and Visually Impaired Persons 2017 / 2018 pada hari ini.

3. Izinkan saya untuk meneruskan ucapan dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

4. I was made to understand that this is the second awards ceremony that has been held since 2016 and that it aims to provide due recognition to blind and visually impaired persons on their remarkable achievements in various fields.

5. The recipients of the five (5) categories of awards today serve as an inspiration and boost towards motivating others, both the abled and differently abled, to beat the odds and reach for the stars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. According to data from the Social Welfare Department, as of March 2019, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) who have registered with the Department was around 538,000. Of this number, almost 47,000 are in the blind and visually impaired category.

7. There has been a steady increase of PWDs registering with the Department since 2010 when the number was only around 314,000.

8. The World Disability Report by the World Health Organization 2011 however estimates that about 15% of the total population of a country comprises of PWDs.

9. However, only 538,000 or 1.7% are captured under the Information System Management of PWDs or SMOKU, and this number is relatively low compared to the estimation by WHO.

10. I would like to call upon all PWDs to register with the Social Welfare Department in order to assist the Department, together with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, to develop targeted policies and programmes for PWDs.

11. In line with the 11th Malaysia Plan, it is my fervent hope that all PWDs are supported and encouraged to participate in the development of our country.

12. Inclusivity is the main pillar of socio-economic development in creating a prosperous and equitable society for all.

13. Thus, it is important that all of us bear the shared responsibility in ensuring PWDs are seamlessly integrated into the mainstream of society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. Towards achieving inclusivity, various Ministries and agencies have established policies, programmes and assistance to elevate the socio-economic and wellbeing status of PWDs.

15. My Ministry, through the Social Welfare Department provides cash assistance to registered PWDs, namely, aid for assistive devices, allowances for disabled workers amounting to RM400 per month as well as allocations of Launching Grants of up to RM2,700 for PWDs to pursue income generating projects.

16. My ministry's plans for 2019 include conducting two (2) studies on PWDs, specifically on employment opportunities for PWDs and also on the support system for carers and guardians of PWDs.

17. Both studies will be headed by Institut Sosial Malaysia. The implementation process for these studies have already begun and is now in the process of identifying the most suitable research team for the projects.

18. I believe that upon completion of the studies, the Ministry will be able to gauge the current situation of PWDs and possibly formulate specific roadmaps as well as evidence-based policies and programmes focusing on this target group.

19. The Education Ministry has also recently pledged their commitment to increase the enrolment of four (4) groups including PWDs in higher education institutions nationwide.

20. A special lane is to be set up for this four (4) categories, with enrolment based on merit still the priority.

21. I am optimistic that all of you here today are heroes in your own way, and this pathway could bring all of you closer towards achieving your dreams and aspirations.

22. Based on statistics provided by the Special Education Division of the Education Ministry, the number of visually impaired students in inclusive schools stands at 900 as compared to the Special Education Integration Programme which has 331 students.

23. Although there is a big disparity in the total number of PWD visuallyimpaired students in the Special Education Integration Programme compared to inclusive schools, we hope for more such students to be absorbed into the inclusive education system. Insya Allah.

Ladies and gentlemen,

24. In terms of employment, the Policy on 1% Intake of PWDs in Public Sector was introduced in 1988 and implemented through Service Circulars in 2008 and 2010, outlining affirmative actions to be taken by Ministries, agencies and Appointment Authorities.

25. According to the Public Service Commission or SPA, a total of almost 3,800 PWDs, or 0.31%, were appointed to a range of positions in the civil service as of the end of last year.

26. From 700 applications received, only two (2) visually impaired persons were successfully appointed.

27. My ministry has surpassed the 1% target with 144 posts (1.77%) filled by PWDs, of the 8,138 posts as a whole.

28. The Defence Ministry came in second with 0.98% of posts filled by PWDs while the Terengganu State Secretariat Office was at third place with 0.97% posts filled by PWDs.

29. In parallel with the pledge by MOE, I trust that SPA, together with the Public Service Department or JPA as well as MOE will collaborate to establish a clear plan of action to effectively execute this policy.

30. Tax incentives are one of the measures taken by the Government to encourage private and corporate employers to employ PWDs, such as double deduction on remuneration paid and expenses spent for training, as well as tax relief on expenditure incurred by employers to facilitate PWD workers.

31. Almost 56% of registered PWDs are of the productive age, thus it would be a waste of prospects and untapped abilities if these individuals are denied the chance to work.

32. On this note, I would like to convey my sincerest appreciation to all employers in the private sector who have carried out this social obligation.

33. You are not only giving a chance at life to the person with disabilities, but you are at the same time uplifting the moral and wellbeing of whole families.

34. The Government, through the Ministry of Human Resources, has also launched the Business Encouragement Assistance Scheme for PWDs for the purpose of supporting PWDs to be economically independent through self-employment.

35. The scheme, amounting to a maximum of RM100,000, offers assistance in the form of equipment to upgrade businesses; for marketing and promotion purposes; and the renovation of business premises.

Ladies and gentlemen,

36. The emergence of visibly talented blind and visually impaired singers and musicians have somehow shifted the negative connotation towards PWDs as a whole.

37. Caliph Buskers, a well-known musical group, is making a wave in the mainstream music industry. Bringing about a constructive impact, Caliph Buskers has opened more doors for the industry to accept blind musicians. For the older generation, the visually impaired singer Stevie Wonder, was also a musical sensation in the 80s.

38. The extraordinary success of the Malaysian paralympic athletes during the last Paralympic Games of Rio de Janeiro also resulted in country-wide awareness of the extent of the capabilities and the capacity of differently abled people if they are given a chance.

39. These disabled athletes had proven that physical challenges are not a barrier in achieving success in their respective fields.

40. I was also in awe of their capabilities when I dropped by to watch these athletes at the Asian Para Games in Jakarta.

41. I watched them play badminton, some even in wheelchairs, as they zipped around the courts with such ease and speed. It was indeed a sight to behold.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

42. At the recent meeting of the National Council for People with Disabilities (MKBOKU), there was a suggestion for more accessible banking systems.

43. A Bank Negara officer was at the meeting and the council acted as a channel to bring the National Council for the Blind and the Central Bank together.

44. This is one of the ways we can build bridges between the right parties towards finding the best solutions for PWDs.

45. Congratulations are in order for all the awards recipients today who I am sure are truly deserving of these accolades.

All of you deserve a big round of applause.

On that note, with the glorious words of Bismillahirrahmanrrahim, it is with great pleasure that I hereby officiate the MAB Excellence Achievement Awards for the Blind and Visually Impaired Persons 2017/2018.

Thank you.

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