

MALAYSIA URBAN FORUM (MUF) 2019

OFFICIATING SPEECH

BY

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MALAYSIA

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1. Alhamdulillah, Praise be to Allah for giving us the opportunity to gather here today at the first ever Malaysia Urban Forum. I believe this is a natural progression from the 9th Session of the World Urban Forum which Malaysia hosted in February 2018, which saw the attendance and participation of 165 nations and almost 30,000 people.

2. Let me start by asking all of you here today, “What do you hope to achieve from this forum?”

3. Perhaps for many of us, we are here to answer one question:

“How do we make our lives and the lives of everyone else better?”

4. Indeed, as more people continue to live in cities, the urban future will be full of challenges, from physical, environmental, social, political and economic perspectives.

Most of all, the “people” are the ones who must come first.

It is about making the city livable, equitable and one which provides a good quality of life for all Malaysians.

I personally like the call of the New Urban Agenda – “That No One is Left Behind and Cities Are For All.”

Distinguished members of the audience,

5. I find it very disturbing that a 2018 report by UNICEF of children in lower income households in Kuala Lumpur found that about 15 per cent of children below the age of five are stunted, 22 per cent are underweight and 23 per cent are either overweight or obese.

They have no conducive place to study and their surrounding environment is unsafe.

While almost all children aged 7 to 17 are in school, only 1 in 2 of those aged 5 and 6 are in preschool.

Hence, while we designed and built our cities, we may have unintentionally marginalised some groups by making our cities and urban areas socially segregated and expensive to live in.

A leading lawyer once remarked, “We are now living in medieval fortresses.”

This seems to be true, with our gated and guarded communities, which separate the haves from the have nots, with the poor only able to glimpse life within the compounds through gated barriers.

6. We cannot deny that there are still pockets of poverty in our urban areas.

In pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2, we should all work towards zero poverty and no hunger or in our case, malnutrition in all our cities.

I quote the great Nelson Mandela who said “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

7. It is my hope that this forum addresses not just the physical design and nature of cities, but also the fundamental issues such as poverty, marginalisation, employment opportunities, cost of living, accessibility to good services, health and the happiness of families living in our cities.

8. The fundamental objective to building better cities is to address the needs of the people living in them.

9. The family unit is the basis of any community; hence a happy family makes for a happy community and a happy, sustainable nation.

10. Currently, 77 percent of Malaysia’s population reside in urban areas and this is expected to increase to 80 percent or 26 million people, by 2030.

A large population in our cities will mean urbanisation challenges such as solid waste disposal, traffic congestion, air pollution, limited water

resources, inadequate supply of affordable housing, demand for basic urban services and severity of flooding due to the urban heat island.

Future growth will have to take place on increasingly limited resources including developable land in our towns and cities.

That is why measures such as rain water harvesting should be included in development plans moving forward so that potable water is not flushed down toilet bowls.

We shall also be challenged by the changes in our demographic profile where Malaysia will become an ageing society by 2030 in which almost 15.3 per cent of the population will be 60 years and above, bringing about new challenges in health services needs and suitable physical environments.

Besides an ageing population, we are also having smaller household sizes.

The nucleus family is changing. There are more singles. Divorces are also more common.

Housing needs for these segments of the population are different compared to the traditional one couple, with two to four children.

We need more community facilities to encourage social interaction for the aging population.

Aged care facilities must be incorporated in every development.

11. The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry (KPWKM) together with the United Nations Development Programme is in the midst of planning an agefriendly city.

The main purpose of this project is to encourage more public participation in local planning with the aim of creating an environment that is child, elderly and disabled friendly.

12. At the same time, the Ministry is also considering a proposal to work with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) towards realising the concept of a Child Friendly City in Malaysia. This concept envisions a town or community where the voice, needs, interests and rights of a child will be of the utmost priority in developing policies and programmes at the local government level.

Our cities have to be aged, child and gender friendly as we prepare ourselves for this change in social profile.

Respected members of the audience,

13. The Sustainable Development Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities requires that its adopters ensure universal access to green, safe and user-friendly public spaces for all citizens, particularly children, elderly people and people with disabilities by 2030.

14. Good quality public spaces are also important as they will create the foundation for community activities, strengthen social cohesion and create an identity for the city with its own natural, historical and cultural factors.

Ensuring our public spaces are clean and well maintained is a collective responsibility.

Just look at the trash strewn around in some parks with broken swings, slides and graffiti all over the equipment.

If we want good quality public spaces, we have to also take responsibility in maintaining them.

15. The impact of technology on our society has been remarkable in more ways than one.

However, people tend to be secluded, spending more time with their gadgets than with other people.

There should be more public spaces in our cities where communities can gather, children can play and families are able to interact (minus their gadgets, of course).

That is why the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has a campaign, “Keluarga Bijak Siber” aimed at ensuring parents spend more quality time with their children by allocating a number of hours where no gadgets can be used by family members.

Respected members of the audience,

The role of urban public spaces in our social lives has become more prominent and significant.

Issues of public spaces and their relation towards creating a vibrant and dynamic city has not been given too much attention in the planning and development of our cities in the past.

16. A World Health Organisation report states that Malaysia has one of the most physically inactive populations in the world, with more than half of the population classified as being “inactive” compared with the global average of 20%.

It is no wonder then that 38.5 per cent of the Malaysian population is overweight while 13.3per cent are classified as obese.

Our overweight population is worrying.

This can, to a certain extent, be overcome by encouraging the population to go out and exercise in well maintained parks.

Who wants to go to a park that is not well maintained and which poses a physical hazard?

Broken swings, uneven jogging tracks and dilapidated equipment discourage people from going out to exercise.

Sedentary lifestyles are a leading cause of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Malaysia.

Diabetes, hypertension, obesity, hypercholesterolemia and heart disease are directly associated with physical inactivity.

Physical inactivity is associated with 25 other chronic diseases.

Regular physical activity reduces the risk of developing heart disease, dementia, some cancers and diabetes by more than 30 per cent.

17. Another major and common byproduct of our urbanisation is traffic and transportation woes.

18. A 2014 World Bank study calculated that our economy lost RM 54 million a day, or RM 20 billion a year due to traffic congestion.

This loss is mainly associated with productivity, wasted fuel and environmental damage caused by exhaust fumes.

Another report found that the total time lost when people are stuck in traffic jams in Kuala Lumpur, doing nothing productive, ranges from RM10bil to RM20bil annually.

Notably, this also amounts to one million wasted hours per day which could be spent on quality time with families and friends.

19. There are also indirect hidden costs, such as a decline in public health induced by inactive lifestyles and stress from traffic congestion. A city built around cars means less space for pedestrians and cyclists. Long, congested morning and afternoon commutes are also associated with higher stress levels.

A report by Frost & Sullivan, discovered that over 40% of Malaysians listed road congestion as their number one frustration.

On the whole, commuting seems to lead to a general decrease in happiness and individual well-being.

Additionally, poor public transportation systems will also have an impact on the lives of the lower income groups and their access to jobs, health, education, community amenities and recreational facilities.

One solution would be to build low income housing near major MRT and LRT routes. The greater the distance, the higher the cost of transport.

Unfortunately, most lower cost accommodation are located far away from public transport.

It is a distance-cost relationship issue.

Respected members of the audience,

20. Malaysia is one of the few countries in the world that has a National Urbanisation Policy. It was first formulated in 2006 in recognition of the fact that the nation was becoming more urbanised.

National urban policies have been vital in orientating actions to tackle liveability, inequality, balanced growth as well as to ensure a sustainable development process for the nation.

21. To ensure the effective implementation of National Urbanisation strategies, good urban governance is a key prerequisite.

Efficient management, partnerships, transparency and accountability can enhance a city's competitiveness, attract investments and contribute towards the healthy economic growth of a city.

Urban development must meet the needs of the people and not just achieve Ringgit and sen goals.

It must be by the people and for the people; not just profits alone. Liveability is also a core component of competitiveness. Hence, cities must have comprehensive basic facilities, infrastructure, good public transportation, safe neighbourhoods and a comfortable and clean environment.

22. Local authorities play an increasingly important role here as they are the main agencies for the planning, development and management of cities. They need to be innovative in managing cities, work in partnerships, use their resources effectively and to continuously improve their service delivery to meet the needs of the local community.

23. There must be inclusivity in all development programmes.

This means that development efforts should be enjoyed by all segments of society in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, difference in abilities, economic status, education levels and religion.

Regardless of where in the city one is or what one's social status is – all citizens should have equal access to public amenities and infrastructure.

That is why KPWKM is in the midst of drawing up National Accessibility Action Plan for the Disabled.

This will result in a community that is progressive and inclusive in line with the spirit of a new Malaysia.

Tourism industry players must also play a part in this by improving accessibility for the disabled at tourism spots, such as providing boardwalks on the beaches for wheelchairs and so on.

This is also an important ingredient for a successful developed nation as ingrained in the 11th Malaysia Plan.

Respected members of the audiences,

24. I am happy to note that the Malaysia Urban Forum has reached out to many stakeholders who are core to building a sustainable nation.

The inclusion of Women, Youth, Children, and Elders is commendable, as I believe their role is crucial in ensuring cities are liveable and sustainable and in the implementation of the SDG's and the New Urban Agenda.

I look forward to listening to their contributions and further commitment towards Malaysia's growth and success.

25. The issue of an ageing society has never emerged in our national development plans.

But we will be an ageing nation by 2030 and we need to have plans and actions required to address the needs of this group, which includes relooking our urban planning and designs as well as our urban development.

We must ensure our cities are peoplefriendly – cities that are barrierfree and with facilities and amenities that will enable our differently abled and elder communities to live equally amongst us.

If our nation or cities are to be truly sustainable, it must be truly equitable.

Distinguished members of the audiences,

26. The core challenges facing this Forum undoubtedly require national responsibility and solidarity.

It also demands a commitment from each and every one of us.

Strong leadership and partnerships at all levels are vital and crucial; from the neighbourhood communities to NGOs; professionals to business and private sectors; and government agencies at local, state and national levels.

27. Communication, consultation and engagement are essential for us to progress forward.

The 4Ps must be acted upon – PeoplePublic-Private-Partnerships.

Public participation should be at both the policy formulation and in its execution.

And unless the people partner the Government in its initiatives, many goals may just remain on paper and not yield any results.

Informed decisions are also key and here again the role of the people; both public and private, are key to ensure that the correct information is received.

Progress and development are dependent on well-thought out decisions and sharing this responsibility amongst key stakeholders is important.

Feedback from the various professional bodies should be incorporated in any development.

Planners must be inclusive in their designs and incorporate universal concepts which local governments must impose in all development plans.

Malaysian planners still have a carcentric and not people-centric mindset. We must move people, not cars.

There must be sustainable mobility in public transportation and privately-owned-vehicles.

Planners must also incorporate the infrastructure for electric-vehicles as we move forward, with enough charging stations for this to flourish.

The sum of it all is progressive sustainability.

Liveability is the key for a healthy and progressive Malaysia.

28. The private sector plays an important role in sustainable development.

Partnerships with the private sector towards implementing the SDGs and transforming the business environment is vital to overcome poverty and financing of sustainable development.

29. I congratulate the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Urbanise Malaysia for organising and hosting the Malaysia Urban Forum 2019.

A multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue, discussion and sharing at a national level is important.

I hope this will become an annual event so that stakeholders can meet more regularly and we can measure the progress of the commitments made in this forum.

I wish to thank UN-Habitat for being the Global Partner for this important programme and the presence and support of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Dato Sri Maimunah Sharif, who is also our former Mayor of Penang and Seberang Perai.

It is good to see you back here in Malaysia and I hope UN-Habitat will continue to support us. I also thank all of you who have come from near and far for your presence here today.

I hope this was a fruitful forum for you and one that will continue to inspire your commitment toward building a sustainable urban nation.

For our guests from abroad, please enjoy your stay and savour the best that Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia has to offer.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations and look forward to hearing the outcome of this forum.

May God Almighty bless our efforts and with “BismillahirrahmanNirRahim” - In the Name of Allah, the Most Righteous, Most Merciful, I declare the Malaysia Urban Forum, officially open.

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