

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA AND MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**“PUBLIC PRIVATE DIALOGUE ON WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE”**

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

WORKSHOP ON INCLUSIVE TRADE IN COMMONWEALTH

**PUBLIC PRIVATE DIALOGUE ON WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Date: 29/01/2019

Venue: PARK ROYAL HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

SALUTASI

(Akan disediakan kemudian)

Y.B. Datuk Ignatius Darell Leiking

Minister of International Trade and Industry

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Your Excellencies, High Commissioners and diplomatic representatives,

Distinguished guests from Ministries and Agencies,

Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

Alhamdulillah, all praise be to Allah SWT, by whose grace and blessings we are gathered here today in conjunction with the Workshop on Inclusive Trade in the Commonwealth.

2. I thank the organizer for your kind invitation for me to speak on the topic of “Public Private Dialogue on Women in the Digital Economy and International Trade”.

3. Before I proceed, allow me, on behalf of the Government, to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for choosing Malaysia as the first country to kick-start the Commonwealth’s dialogue and discussion on inclusive and sustainable trade.

I would like to wish a very warm “Selamat Datang” to Malaysia to all participants.

4. Congratulations to the International Trade Centre (ITC) for co-organising this Workshop that provides a platform for stakeholders from the Commonwealth countries to exchange ideas and best practices in addressing the systemic barriers to women’s full participation in the digital economy and international trade.

5. I would also like to commend the Ministry of International Trade and Industry for the successful convening of this timely initiative.

Purpose of Workshop

6. I was informed that the main agenda of this workshop is to discuss the role of women entrepreneurs in international trade and economic activities.

7. One of the innovative solutions to be launched later is the “SheTrades Outlook”.

This application is aimed at connecting more women entrepreneurs whilst promoting a more robust and fair trade.

By making data on trade and government contracts more transparent, this would enable more women entrepreneurs to participate in bidding and tender processes.

8. This approach is timely given the increasing bias that favours men in the public and private sectors.

Many women entrepreneurs start out as small ventures.

Therefore, it would take a while for them to be connected to existing networks for greater opportunities in reducing trade barriers.

9. I foresee that SheTrades, which aims to connect one million women entrepreneurs to market by 2020, will also help corporations to include more women entrepreneurs in their supply chains.

10. In this regard, I wish to thank the ITC for including Malaysia in the pilot phase of the SheTrades Outlook alongside Bangladesh, Ghana, Jamaica and the United Kingdom.

I understand this will be launched in early 2020.

Workshop Background

Distinguished members of the audience,

11. While we are upbeat at the prospect of breaking trade barriers through the digital economy, we must remain cognisant of potential global crises that may affect businesses and trade relations.

Both the public and private sectors must take all necessary measures to minimise any headwinds that are disruptive to current systems and networks.

12. Given this scenario, the Workshop on Inclusive Trade in the Commonwealth was birthed following the adoption of the Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda on Trade in Investment (CCA) by the Commonwealth Leaders during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018.

13. The Declaration (CCA) was the first trade and investment-related agenda ever adopted by the Commonwealth to generate inclusive and

participative economic growth and to deliver the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs).

14. The Action Plan to realise the CCA was developed based on five clusters, namely, physical, digital, regulatory, business-to-business and supply-side connectivity.

15. These are the areas where Commonwealth Members can collaborate through experience sharing and voluntary mutual support to enable Commonwealth member countries to realise their full economic potential and deliver prosperity for all their people.

Women, girls and SDGs

16. Allow me to briefly mention that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all world leaders in 2015 embodies a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and promises to leave no one behind.

17. Three years after its adoption, women and girls are still experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination across sectors and not just in trade and economy.

18. UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, in 2018 reported that globally, 15 million girls of primary-school age will never get the chance to learn, read or write in primary schools compared to 10 million boys.

19. Without access to basic education, women and girls will not be able to end poverty, fight hunger, promote prosperity, champion inclusive growth and build peaceful and just societies.

20. They will not be able to wrest the opportunities in trade and entrepreneurship as well.

21. The systematic mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs is therefore crucial.

22. I applaud the Commonwealth for incorporating this perspective in the workshop discussion today.

Inclusivity

23. This entails a significant commitment to make trade and investment more inclusive by encouraging the participation of women and youth in business activities, taking a gender-responsive approach to the development of trade policies, increasing opportunities for women to participate in international trade, and breaking down gender barriers in all economic sectors.

24. To advance these goals, I call for deeper collaboration by the Commonwealth Secretariat with other international organisations in advocating the agenda of inclusivity in your future work and deliberations, especially during the Commonwealth Trade Ministers' Meeting in September 2019.

Malaysia: The Way Forward

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

25. Allow me now to turn my focus and talk about some of the economic and social priorities that the Malaysian Government will advocate in shifting the norms of conventional thinking in business, entrepreneurship and trade.

26. Malaysia acknowledges that women play a great role in nation building, especially in social and economic spheres.

In fact, Malaysia has a long history of women's ventures in business which has contributed greatly in amassing national wealth.

27. For instance, the Siti Khadijah Market in the east coast state of Kelantan and the Pekan Rabu Market in Kedah, where I grew up, are prominent examples of largely women traders and entrepreneurs in the markets.

28. As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Malaysia is committed to ensure that women and girls have equal opportunities in both socio-economic and political activities.

New normal

29. The reason is obvious.

30. The recovery from the global financial crisis is still too tepid.

Even as the crisis abates, we find ourselves facing the gravest challenges to growth, namely, demographic and economic disparities.

31. An ageing population and economic disparity are our new normal.

32. Given these challenges, we will need all the economic growth, dynamism and ingenuity we can get to move forward.

33. Thankfully, we now know that a key part of the solution is staring us right in the face, in the form of unleashing the economic power of women.

34. Let me reiterate my belief that the exclusion of women from a nation's economic landscape is harmful.

Gender gaps in the labour force participation ranges from 12% in the OECD economies to 50% in the Middle East and North Africa.

35. Another global reality: when women work, they tend to be stuck in low-paying and low-status jobs.

Globally, women earn much less than men even with the same level of education and occupation.

36. Women also struggle with job options once they embrace motherhood. They want more flexible work options, and partly because of that, they are locked out of higher-status careers and leadership positions.

Luckily in Malaysia, 36% of our senior officers in the public sector are women.

Unleashing the economic potential of women: SMEs

37. This brings me to my next point on how to unleash the economic power and potential of women.

38. I would like to postulate that there are 3 main ways to do this.

They are; changing economic policies; changing laws and institutions; and changing attitudes and culture.

The first two suggestions are within the Government's control while the third one is tricky.

39. Governments can lift women up by adopting more profemale and pro-family policies.

Such policies include providing more affordable child-care and parental leave and allowing for more flexible working arrangements.

40. Herein lies the inherent value of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in our quest to elevate women participation in our labour force and trade.

41. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Women's Report (2016) stated that an estimated 163 million women are already starting or running new businesses in 74 economies around the world.

42. Women entrepreneurs provide incomes for their families, employment for their communities, and products and services that bring new value to the world around them.

43. SMEs are the backbone of the Malaysian economy.

Approximately 99% of businesses in the country belong in the SME category.

Women-owned businesses constitute 20.6% (186,930) of total SMEs in Malaysia (907,065) and of this, the majority (97.2%) are in the services sectors.

Malaysia's Initiatives

44. To this end, a number of programmes and initiatives have been put in place to assist and build the capacities of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia. These include:

44.1. The Women Exporters Development Programme (WEDP) for SMEs to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in exports;

44.2. The Community Based Enterprise (CBE) Programme under the Welfare Department to provide business guidance and entrepreneurship assistance for low income women and single mothers;

45. SME Corp conducted 10 programmes costing RM2.3 billion which benefited 364,052 women entrepreneurs.

MySMELady was launched by SME Bank in October 2018 to finance women entrepreneurs who wish to expand and grow their businesses.

46. The benefit is clear: when we boost the participation of women, we boost the growth potential of a country.

47. Yet, I note that much needs to be done in the private sector.

Women comprise only 19% of the board members of public listed companies with market capitalisation of RM2 billion and above.

48. One of the policy interventions that the new Government has instituted through the 2019 National Budget was for the private sector to ensure a 30% target for women directors can be achieved by 2020.

49. From a macro planning point of view, the Mid-Term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan has revised the target of the female labour participation rate from 47.9% to 56.5% by 2020.

50. For women entrepreneurs in rural areas, the Government has just launched the Harapan Rural Development Plan 2018-2023 to produce more rural women entrepreneurs through training and

entrepreneurship courses, exhibitions and development of online businesses.

Currently, of the 740 rural entrepreneurs on the online business platform, DesaMall@online, 80% are women.

Throughout 2019, 250 rural entrepreneurs will be trained under this programme.

51. Notwithstanding these existing efforts, we welcome the Commonwealth's continued commitment to assist Commonwealth members in further accelerating women's economic empowerment.

Digital economy

52. Aside from empowerment, we must always be sensitive to shifting trends because economic history never moves in a linear form but always in cycles.

And as the economy moves, policymakers cannot afford to stand still.

53. Historically, Singapore is a classic case-study on transforming from a manufacturing powerhouse to a worldclass financial centre.

This success stems from its unique commitment to openness, expert talents and sensitivity to shifting trends.

Some people say that it is often windy in Singapore.

54. Winds bring change and opportunity.

55. And this time around, winds have blown open doors to the new future of digital economy in this region.

56. And yet the transformation to digital economy appears daunting, destabilizing and even threatening.

This change is said to be disruptive to our habits, jobs, and social interactions.

But the key here is to harness the benefits while managing the risks.

57. Recognising the importance of the digital economy, Malaysia has undertaken concerted efforts to spur the digital transformation and embarked on various initiatives to enable greater participation of local businesses in e-commerce, and facilitate access to global markets.

58. These, among others, include the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) which is tasked to spearhead Malaysia's Digital Hub and various Technopreneurship programmes.

59. For Malaysia to fully unlock the potential of the digital economy, the World Bank's publication entitled "Malaysia's Digital Economy: A New Driver of Development" has recommended four (4) important policy goals.

60. These are;

- a) Creating a more dynamic digital ecosystem;
- b) Achieving universal, fast, and inexpensive internet connectivity;
- c) Safeguarding future tax revenues; and
- d) Improving human capital through better curricula and lifelong learning opportunities.

61. This Workshop's focus on the digital economy is timely given that our world today is one where millennials are reinventing how our economy works while keeping their phones in hand.

62. Digital economy is shifting our traditional transactions.

People now are shopping online, paying with contactless bank cards, and sending money within using platforms such as Paypal.

63. More fundamentally, we must ensure that this change is not detrimental to women.

While not discounting the risk of the digital divide, women entrepreneurs must seize the chance brought about by digital economy to equip themselves with the right tools and using the right platforms to grow their businesses and venture beyond.

64. It is my fervent hope that while markets worldwide are opening up, governments must keep their sight on closing the digital, regulatory and innovation divide emanating from the various changes we had.

No one should be excluded in the age of the digital economy.

Conclusion

Respected members of the audience,

65. It is my sincere hope that this four-day Workshop will not only serve as a platform for participants to discuss a system-based approach and its application on inclusive trade. I hope it will also provide practical experiences on gender mainstreaming into trade and investment policies

66. Hopefully the outcome will enable us to share best practices on increasing the participation and success of women-owned businesses in international trade among Commonwealth members via digital platforms.

67. I urge everyone especially women and girls to dare to make the difference. Together, we can unlock the doors to success and unblock all the avenues of opportunities.

68. On this note, it is with great pleasure that I declare open the Workshop on Inclusive Trade in Commonwealth. I wish you a successful and fruitful Workshop.

Thank you.

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