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SPEECH BY

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF  
THE ISLAMIC MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM  
ORGANIZED BY  
THE ISLAMIC MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA (IMAM)  
12TH MARCH 2005, MANCHESTER ROYAL INFIRMARY,  
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1. First of all, allow me to express my gratitude to the Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia (IMAM), for inviting me to officially open this Islamic Medical Symposium. I am delighted that I am able to be a part of this significant event and I am extremely pleased to see a vibrant and active Muslim medical community here.

2. I believe that programs like this are extremely important as a platform for Muslim medical professionals and students, not only to exchange views and ideas but also for them to speak out and make their voices heard on issues concerning them and the Muslim Ummah. I encourage IMAM to carry out more similar programs in the future so that the Muslim medical community can better express themselves and subsequently play a bigger role for the benefit of the community.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. When History tells us of "The Dark Ages", between the ancient civilisations and the Renaissance era in Europe, a fact that is often neglected is that that nomenclature only refers to Europe. In reality, while Europe was in "The Dark Ages", the flame of science, technology, knowledge and discovery burned bright in the Muslim world. As the Muslim empire spread, they brought with them Islamic teachings, which, amongst a myriad of other virtues, placed great a emphasis on the culture of learning and respect for knowledge.

4. Such was the nature of Islam, that when vast territories were conquered by the Muslims, not only were the cultures of the conquered nations preserved, they were also introduced to new concepts and ideals based on the teachings of Islam, which led to development and modernization. This in itself was of course a unique characteristic of the Muslim Empire, starkly different from other conquerors in history who were prone to eliminate any trace of those they have vanquished in favour of putting their own stamp on all that they have conquered.

5. Instead, as the Muslims expanded their empire they laid the foundations for the formation of a well-organized society, with high regard for order, discipline and

respect for authority. They tolerated other religions, stressed the importance of knowledge, encouraged cleanliness and forbade destruction. In short, in its heyday, the Muslim empire gave rise to a perfect environment for the birth of a true civilisation.

6. It was in this period that medical science experienced its golden era of discovery and growth. Centers of medical knowledge bloomed in Syria, Egypt and Persia, where physicians were encouraged to translate and study medical knowledge from ancient texts, and subsequently expand contemporary medical wisdom using research and experimentation. Baghdad, the center of the Muslim empire, became a center of knowledge where vast amounts of scholarly works across different disciplines were pooled in great libraries. Great names in the history of science emerged in this era, namely Al Razi (a.k.a Razes), Al Zahrawi (a.k.a Abulcasis, Bucasis, Alzahravius), Ibn Sina (a.k.a Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (a.k.a Averroes), among others.

7. Hospitals, as we know them today, were first conceptualised during this period. If previously the sick were given places to stay in temple annexes or places run by priests, the Islamic civilisation introduced the concept of a hospital for all, a building run by physicians to aid the sick regardless of race, colour or creed. Separate wards for different ailments as well as separate wards for men and women were introduced in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Male and female nurses too were specially trained to care for the sick, and for the first time in history proper medical records of patients were kept.

8. In addition, it was during this period, specifically in 931 A.D during the Abassid Caliphate, at which time Sinnan Ibn Thabit was the Chief Court Physician, that for the first time, physicians were screened and only qualified physicians were allowed to practice. This, and the Islamic Medical Code of Ethics laid down by Al Tabari in 970 A.D laid the foundation for the proper regulation and licensing of Medical professionals which are implemented everywhere in the world today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. The history I have just recounted was not for the purpose of us, as Muslims, to glorify our past and wallow in melancholy for greatness departed. On the contrary, it is to show that Islam can and does bring about development and modernisation if the correct principles and ideals of Islam are adhered to in every aspect of our lives. Islam is a religion that transcends time and space. Islam is synonymous with civilisation. History attests to this.

10. Over the centuries, Muslims have suffered a serious decline. We are mired in conflict amongst ourselves, and bogged down with our own differences. Thousands of sects and schools of thought have emerged as though there are many versions of Islam when the fact of the matter is that there is only one. Today, we see that even among Muslims, the battles and debates continue as to who is the most righteous of them all.

11. Whilst this is going on, the world has moved on ahead of us. If in history Muslims were the pioneers of science and technology, today we are lagging far behind. Worse, we have allowed our religion to be hijacked, manipulated and abused by a handful few, who, because of their warped extremist views, have caused all Muslims the world over to suffer from prejudice and bigotry.

12. We have allowed ourselves to be placed in a position where we have to defend against baseless allegations that Muslims are violent and aggressive, whilst in actual fact, if the principles of Islam were adhered to and if all Muslims lived by the tenets of Islam, it would be plain for all the world to see that Islam is a religion of peace. Day by day, we see no improvements and we are a far cry from who we were before, once upon a time in history.

13. This cannot continue. We must change this state of affairs and this change must start now. At every level, every individual Muslim must make a commitment to change for the better. It is incumbent upon us to show the world that the glory of Islam was not just a proverbial flash in the pan of human history. We must herald in the renaissance of the Muslim civilisation, here and now, in the 21st century.

14. It is with this in mind that we in Malaysia have begun the move to spread the concept of Islam Hadhari. This is not another new sect or a new Islam as some irresponsible parties allege it to be. As I have said, there is only one Islam. Islam Hadhari is simply a return to the fundamentals of Islam, the tenets and principles of Islam in the Quran and Sunnah. It is a return to the philosophy that Islam is both for the world and the hereafter and that it certainly does not mean having to choose one or the other. It is the belief and knowledge that one can be a good Muslim and at the same time be successful in one's worldly endeavours. That Muslims can and must become progressive and modern and successful so that we can earn the respect of others.

15. Today I speak in front of a room full of Muslim doctors and would-be doctors. I believe all of you are the shining examples of what a Muslim should be: Successful in your profession, yet steadfastly true to your faith and your identity as Muslims. IMAM as an Islamic medical association is in a position to further showcase to the world that Muslim medical professionals are just as good if not better than anyone else in the profession. Indeed, for Muslim doctors especially, being good at what you do is not just a part of your profession, it is part of your faith. Islam asks us to help the needy, to care for the sick, to be in a perpetual state of cleanliness and hygiene and on top of that to continuously seek knowledge. You are well placed to show the world that Muslims can excel, that they can be pioneers in science and technology and make meaningful contributions for the betterment of society.

16. To a certain extent, I think Muslim medical professionals have already succeeded in doing this, as can be shown in many examples. None, however, is more striking than during the recent Tsunami disaster. I am, as are, I'm sure, all Malaysians, extremely proud of our medical teams who were on hand in the affected areas, from the time the disaster struck, right up until this very day, working tirelessly to aid the victims of that calamity. I understand that IMAM works closely with organizations such as MERCY Malaysia and other similar medical groups, to create a network to provide medical care to those in need. This is a most commendable effort and I hope that your effort for the cause of humanity continues.

17. I also hope that as you mature and grow from strength to strength, IMAM as an organization, would take on a bigger role, and work with similar organizations around the world to bring to the fore the best Muslim medical minds so that there can be a convergence of ideas both for the advancement of medical science as well as for the overall benefit of mankind. It is our aspiration as an Ummah that in modern times, just like many centuries ago in history, life-altering milestones in medical science

and technology will once again originate from among Muslim scholars and scientists. I do not believe that this is something beyond our reach. We can succeed if we truly put our hearts and minds to it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. I am glad that I am able to briefly share my thoughts with you here today and I am extremely pleased to have been able to be a part of this symposium. I do hope that your discussions and deliberations here would lead to bigger and greater achievements not just for the Muslim medical community here but also for society at large InshaAllah. Eventually, I hope many, if not all of you will return to serve in Malaysia, so that many of your countrymen will be able to partake of your wisdom and expertise gained from your years of experience and exposure abroad.

19. Once again I'd like to thank IMAM for inviting me to be a part of this occasion. I do hope that this Symposium will be a resounding success and I wish the organizers and the participants all the very best. On that note and in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious And Most Merciful, I officially declare this Islamic Medical Symposium open.

Thank you.