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YB Dato'Azalina Othman, Minister of Youth and Sports,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a real pleasure for me to be here this morning. Leadership is a subject that transcends and affects all of us. We all have a stake in leadership, for leaders cannot exist in a void. After all, the rasion d'etre of leadership is followers. So long as you have someone to lead, you will have leadership. Parents are leaders of the family; CEOs are captains of corporations and industries; Prime Ministers and Presidents are leaders of their countries. Even nations can be leaders of their regions or even the whole world. Simply put, without followers, there are no leaders. There is an inextricable relationship between the leader and the follower. There are times when the leader leads and I am sure there are occasions when the leader follows. Even the Victorian British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli remarked, "We live in an age of prudence. The leaders of the people now generally follow".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There have been significant shifts in the way we live over the last few decades, accentuated by the nebulous and latent forces of globalization. While this term is relatively new, its origins are certainly not. The difference currently is the degree and extent of the global reach as compared to previous centuries. It has often been said that we are at present living in a shrinking world. Indeed we are, and it is getting smaller and smaller. We are much more interdependent and interconnected today than ever before. Globalisation has allowed all of us to be much more accessible to the world and the world available to us. The key question has always been our willingness, our ability and our capacity to be part of this globalised world.

Countries like China have benefited tremendously from globalization, for it has allowed that once closed and controlled economy to become one big market place for the world. Perhaps in a most graphic fashion, one writer recently wrote that many children in the United States would probably believe that China is one big Toyland as many of the toys that they play with have the label, "Made in China". On the converse side, globalization has produced a whole gamut of challenges, impinging on issues such as sovereignty, competitiveness and matters pertaining to society.

In essence, with globalization, modern states are faced with a greater challenge of trying to strike a balance - On the one hand, the need to take bold steps to change what needs to be changed for the betterment of the society, and on the other hand, to preserving the good things that we cherish as a nation and as a society. As such leaders have to be much more knowledgeable than ignorant; opened rather than close-minded; and be prepared and willing to accept new ideas and discard old ones; and be bold rather than indecisive; to make decisions that would bring benefit to the

country.

Distinguished guests,

The literature is abound with different kinds of approaches to the subject of leadership, identifying various types of leaders, stemming from narcissistic leaders, creative leaders to arguably the highest form of leadership, transformational leadership.

It is interesting to look at leaders over the centuries and I myself often wonder what leadership was like say, during the Middle Ages. With Hollywood's epic films, depicting the lives of leaders during the vast historical period, gives us a graphic glimpse of the lives and performances of leaders of previous centuries. Granted that some if not most of the depictions are often skewed by the extent of the creativity of the directors and screenwriters, and even exaggerated for the delight of the mass audience, they nonetheless tell us that the very basis of leadership has not changed. For leaders have to take the lead, whether in the battlefields of the marshy plains of Germania, or in the political battlefields of Parliament. Whether the basis of a leader's strength was demonstrated by his physique and being dexterous with the sword, or his oratory skills, and even his good looks and charm, they all share one common denominator, that of having the ability to lead and motivate people. Whether based on hereditary rights, instilling fear on their subjects, or by winning elections, leaders over the centuries have been able to motivate and lead people, producing all sorts of consequences. From victory and triumphant to defeat and despair, leaders have produced a mix bag of results. No leader has been able to win all the time, and neither have they all been failures. Trials and tribulations confront leaders and what is usually required is the ability to make a bold decision and to be responsible for whatever the outcome.

There is much debate whether a leader could be made or that leaders are born. The Greek Philosopher, Aristotle, the teacher of Alexander the Great, once remarked, "Men are marked out from the moment of birth to rule or to be ruled". Some leaders have claimed their ascendancy as manifest destiny. However, I think this dichotomy is not as clear today as perhaps before, for most leaders could be moulded and as democracy becomes entrenched, everyone has a fair chance.

Democracy has helped to shape the concept of leadership in the present world. Democracy has created a much more level playing field and with the right kinds of attributes, many can become leaders, as the demand of leadership has increased tremendously. With greater access to education and a much higher standard of living, even in the realm of leadership, it is becoming highly competitive. Believe me, any politician will testify to that.

To me, one of the most important aspects of leadership in the 21st Century is the need to perform. Performance has become synonymous with leadership. You could argue that this has been around for centuries, for even the Great Caesar himself, if he did not win his battles, he would find it difficult to keep his massive army motivated. However, today, because of the competition and the greater demands of society, performance has become indispensable to leadership.

Together with performance, a leader must have a vision, translated in today's lexicon as agendas. A leader must have an agenda – an agenda that would guide his leadership and provide the motivation for those he leads and to bring benefits for all.

Inherent in this, is the need for the leader to be aware of his environment. He need not be an expert in all field, but that he must have a good sense of knowledge, of history and of contemporary issues. Referring to history does not merely mean the traditional notion of dates and events of a country but it could also mean the development of the particular field that the leader is involved in. It is so important for leaders to have the breadth of knowledge. I believe it was Winston Churchill who once said that "The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward".

In both the public and private sectors, we need to create as many potential leaders as possible. I would like to suggest that organisations should take the question of leadership seriously and invest in the learning and making of leaders. It was John F. Kennedy who once said, "Leadership and Learnership are indispensable to one another".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This brings me to the theme of your conference today. I see youth leadership as a critical factor within the overall context of leadership. They form an important integral part of the society and of the nation. They could also be seen as a feeder into higher levels of leadership. When I talk of leadership here, I am not restricting to only political leadership, but rather one that covers a multifarious of professions. Malaysia today is far more opened and willing to embrace younger leaders to run organisations and corporations.

While younger leaders may lack the experience and wisdom, they compensate with creativity and their willingness to learn and to accept new ideas. We need new thinking and innovation in order to meet the challenge of a highly competitive globalised world.

I believe we should get institutions of learning and non-profit organizations to conduct leadership programmes that could help nurture young leaders so that their full potential could be tapped. We should provide greater guidance for youth leadership. In this respect, I would like to see the development of many such centres within existing institutions and that greater efforts are made to expose potential leaders to the subject of leadership. I know that there are Centres of Excellence around the world, where participants are exposed to what is commonly referred to as Executive leadership programmes. We may well need to expose youth leaders to such centres and if cost is a factor, then to find alternatives, where a greater number could be exposed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe Malaysia is very fortunate for we have had leaders that have emerged at the right time for that particular period of our relatively short nation's life. All the five Prime Ministers have ascended to the helm of the political apex at times when it suited their presence. From Tunku to Pak Lah, we have five leaders who have contributed so much to the society and country.

When Tunku led the independence movement and subsequently became our first Premier, his diplomatic skills and being an anglophile helped him to reassure the British that granting independence to Malaya was the right thing to do. To be given freedom without bloodshed is far greater an achievement than with the spilling of blood over the flag of independence. Tunku's affable personality and his astute skills

in negotiating first and foremost with the all ethnic groups and then together to negotiate with London were indispensable towards Malaya's quest for independence. Were we to have someone different, someone the British were suspicious of, things could well turn out differently. Tunku, our Father of Independence was a great Malaysian leader, who was destined to lead us in breaking the shackles of colonialism.

Tunku, and Malaysia were equally fortunate to have Tun Abdul Razak, initially as Tunku's Deputy and subsequently, our Second Prime Minister. While being Deputy Premier, Tun Razak, essentially ran the country, toiling the fields and putting into place a major economic and societal reform – a reform that was to transform a community and a nation. The Father of Development was not only a visionary leader, but he was a leader who had great empathy towards the people and his tireless efforts in transforming the rural areas, bringing towns to the villages, if you like, endeared him to his fellow countrymen. His presence in the country was so timely, for we needed a leader to put meat and meaning to our nascent independence. He gave us hopes and aspirations and raised the stakes for all to be successful.

Tun Hussein Onn, our Third Premier, was the leader who was needed to carry out the agenda that his predecessor had put into place. He was the right man for the right job. Just imagine, if Malaysia had a leader who was ambitious for he could have merely dismantled this social and economic reform and replace with something else, thereby disrupting its implementation. Tun Hussein was a prudent leader who basically took on a job that needed to be done and when the time was up, he called it a day, passing the baton to Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

Malaysia is fortunate to have had Dr. Mahathir as Prime Minister at that particular juncture of our history. With the passing of a decade of the New Economic Policy, the country needed a leader who could elevate our sense of achievement and break our mental barrier so that we were able to meet the challenge of the times, which was becoming that much more complex, especially with the advent of globalization. Dr. Mahathir had a unique combination as a leader, for he was both a visionary and a man of action, for he got things moving. He was indeed an iconoclastic leader, someone who challenged prevailing ideas and beliefs even the status quo.

Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi became the country's fifth Prime Minister at a most significant period of the life of our nation. With the increasing pressures of globalization, demanding a much more opened and transparent economy and business environment, with a much more democratic political governance, Pak Lah's ascendancy is so timely. His affable personality, his sincerity, while being imbued with a strong moral and religious sense, he has become our Prime Minister at the right time, for the country needed new approaches and paradigms, both domestically and internationally. His diplomatic approach, which is more subtle, has proven to be effective. At present, Malaysia enjoys good relations with all countries, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the less powerful.

YAB. Pak Lah's strong religious background but yet modern in his outlook is such a significant asset in today's complex world. His leadership in leading the Islamic world, through OIC, is so much needed, given the rise of religiosity in the international arena. World leaders look at Pak Lah for a moderate voice in what appears to be an increasing negative perception of what constitutes Islam. We must all give him the full support for his Islamic Hadhari approach, for this may well be the Ummah's hope to fight against extremism. In this respect, Malaysia is blessed to

have Pak Lah at the helm where his leadership style is most needed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I like to conclude here by saying that the real test of leadership is during times of adversity. During crisis, the leader is tested to the fullest. All his attributes are being challenged – the knowledge that he has; the experience and wisdom that he has accumulated; the boldness of his decision; his charisma and motivating skills to lead the people out of the morass. Adverse periods often bring the best and sometimes the worse of people and it is just as true with leadership.

In today's world, one does not have to fight in the beaches or in the mountains, to have a great sense of leadership. Many great battles are today fought not with bullets and the shedding of blood, but rather with words and deeds. To resort to the use of force is easy but to rely on the use of words is that much more difficult. It may be premature to talk of a farewell to arms, for conflicts will always be with us. When one sees and hears the senseless carnage in Iraq, one can't help but to feel that leadership has remained elusive in that war-torn part of the world. History has shown us that often it is out of such a quagmire that a leader will emerge. But equally, history has taught us that such leaders may not necessarily be perfect.

In and around the world, we are in dire need for leaders of sufficient benevolence to preside our societies. As society becomes more sophisticated so is the requirement of leaders. Leaders must be bold enough to not only make predictions but be able to create the future itself. Leaders today are to take and must take the lead and to perform – for these are the essence of leadership in a globalised world.

Thank you very much.