

By : **DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK
PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA**

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Title : **IKIM INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM**

***“ISLAM AND THE NEW ERA OF ASEAN COUNTRIES: UNITY OF WORLDVIEW
TOWARDS A SHARED PROSPERITY”***

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and good morning. Salam 1 Malaysia,

YABhg. Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, Chairman, Institute of Islamic Understanding
Malaysia (IKIM),

YBhg. Datuk Nik Mustapha Haji Nik Hassan, Director-General, IKIM

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Alhamdulillah, all praise and glory be to Allah SWT, for it is with His blessings and guidance that we are gathered here today.
2. I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) for its efforts in organising this international symposium on “Islam and the New Era of ASEAN Countries”.
3. This is a timely symposium that puts Islam and ASEAN’s state of affairs into a much needed perspective. With a total population of almost 600 million, ASEAN countries represent almost 10% of the world population. **By 2015, it aims to transform itself into a single free-trade area—as an economic community similar to the European Union—**with a potential of the eighth largest world economy. It seeks to position itself as a long-term economic power player around the globe with other developing economies such as China, Brazil and India. Muslims have everything to gain and little to lose, by binding themselves in such an economic community.
4. Of all the regional groupings in the world today, ASEAN is easily the most heterogeneous. More than the combined **215 million populations** of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei are Muslims. More than the **150 million** of Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar are Buddhists; **85 million** of the Philippines’ are Christians, and so on. **Prosperity can only be achieved through peaceful co-existence and cooperation among religious adherents of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and others.** We hope to witness in a very near future, the fascinating rise of ASEAN and its campaign to unite these multi-religious communities. This may prove to be a unique and decisive chapter of ASEAN and its history.

5. There are almost **220 million ASEAN Muslims**, which constitute **about 40 percent** of the ASEAN population today. This makes them the biggest religious group in ASEAN. As Muslims are a major player and stakeholder in ASEAN's future and venture, they must develop into a proportionately productive force for the benefit of ASEAN and humanity at large.

6. Established in this part of the world from the seventh century onward, Islam has been readily accepted by the ordinary people who got a sense of human worth and dignity. Their strength of spirituality and religions must be harnessed towards a positive outlook, and not extremism. Muslims in their past history neither adopted the attitude of withdrawal, nor took the path of obscurantism. The Muslim society has co-existed alongside other religious adherents, including the Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu.

7. The most positive attitude of Muslims in their past history is to manifest religious conviction through knowledge-based innovation, to construct new technological discovery, to transform scientific paradigm, and to revolutionise scientific methodology. '*Amal salih*' means to be beneficial to society which includes non-Muslim.

8. Many Western historians of ideas and culture are convinced that this is a time of their cultural sunset, depleted energies and moral confusion—despite its extraordinary technological capabilities. **The present decadence covers a cultural, moral, political, and economic disaster of the first order**, which has triumphed in various facets of modern life, leading to spiritual paralysis. The present system is increasingly being blamed for a host of global ills, including the loss of jobs, unfair terms of trade, the global spread of diseases and epidemics, and excessive Western cultural homogenisation that threatens to submerge local customs and norms. **Can Muslims play their role to create a new present?**

9. With this in mind, it is clear that ASEAN Muslim communities must **be ready to engage with the wider world**. We must be ready to take advantage of the many opportunities that ASEAN offers us. At the same time, we must also be **prepared to tackle the many challenges that ASEAN will put in our path**. We must heed the call of the Earth Charter—a United Nations Global instrument—for a collective effort of the human race to take up shared responsibility in achieving sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and culture of peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. As Muslims, we must **commit ourselves to enhancing our competitiveness** in order to play a contributing role to the advancement of human civilisation, as was the legacy of the Islamic ummah in the past. The rich and vibrant heritage of Muslims must be put back into the very heart of ASEAN politics and culture.

11. I believe that our way forward – if Muslim communities are to seek a wider and more active role in ASEAN – **needs to take into account these three important imperatives**.

12. Firstly, we must **identify bases of Muslim cooperation through the worldview of Islam** to renew the spirit of unity and the bond of community among Muslims. Today, Islam is a global faith that binds Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, Berbers, Turks, Europeans, Africans, Indo-Pakistanis, Caucasians, Chinese, and Malay-Indonesians together in a common bond.

13. This bond is founded on *tawhid* and the submission to Allah S.W.T. To believe in One God means **to believe in the essential unity of the human race as His creation** and subjects who are answerable finally to Him alone. It affirms the equality of the entire human race except in terms of goodness and virtue. Rasulullah said that *'we are all children of Adam and Adam was of dust.'*

14. **Religious loyalty** means to give priority to the needy over ourselves. Social relationship is sustained by feelings of love and mercy where the strong should give kindness, protection and generous treatment to the weak and the needy.

15. **We must prevent ourselves from being pitted against each other**, let alone from violent conflicts. Conflict begets conflict in an unending violent spiral that continues to choke our ability to progress and advance.

16. **Moving forward**, we need to renew our understanding of Islam. We must emphasise our common heritage, and put aside any sectarian differences which can lead to division and conflict.

17. **We must prioritise our investment in education and skills.** The rise of every great nation is preceded by the acquisition of knowledge. We need to build a knowledgeable society in which real and true knowledge is the governing principle of all human activities. We need to build institutions to enhance the peoples' capacity for greater learning and knowledge absorption. This is the way of success.

18. Ultimately, we must begin to move beyond politics and conflict, and focus on the issues that truly concern us as an ummah: tackling poverty, eliminating illiteracy, combating ignorance, and raising the quality of life. This is the immediate concern for us all, as Muslims. **With regard to the Maqasid al-Syari'ah**, the government of Malaysia is fully committed to safeguarding the higher objectives of the Syari'ah of Islam. All programmes of national transformation which have been implemented thus far are in accordance with the Maqasid of the Syari'ah, which is to protect **five fundamental rights--life, religion, the intellect, earnings and property ownership, as well as personal honour and dignity.**

19. Secondly, we must **respect the principles of diversity.** Differences in terms of religious traditions, cultures, languages, and skin colours must be duly appreciated. There is unity beneath external diversity of languages and colors. To co-exist, we must call for cooperation between adherents of all great religions, based on our parallel religious ethics, our comparable moral values, and our similar experiences of common humanity.

20. Together we must **engage our common adversary:** forces which are socially divisive and of the extremists, who lead to lawless situations, whether political, moral or social. Our basic unity must remain unaltered, as we human beings feel in the same way. We hope for prosperity and we fear underdevelopment. And religion offers mighty power of transformation to achieve happiness and well-being. **With religion, we rise above all petty things to a new height—to the heaven of stability.** This requires a rejection against any form of criminal violence, extremism, terrorism, and militancy which is an anathema to stability.

21. Now, the Prophet Muhammad states that, **"All creatures are God's family ('iyaalullah), and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His family most kindly"**

(narrated by al-Bayhaqi etc). All creatures are equal dependants upon God, Who feeds, nourishes and sustains them; all humanity is equally under God's care. And those dearest to God are the ones who are of benefit to others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. Thirdly, we must **establish social justice**, based on timeless universal religious principles. It is the concern for the welfare of the poor—the consideration for the economically needy, the indigent, and the deprived. It is through social justice that the liberation of good, human capabilities will be realised, so that every Muslim and individual citizen can positively participate in our system of governance.

23. **A permanent solution to the problems** of indigenous Muslim minorities must be found, for example in the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar. On the one hand, these Muslims should be made to understand that they must live under current national governments. These Muslims must recognise the true responsibilities within the current nation-states and contribute the utmost to the moral and socio-economic strengths of the nation.

24. On the other hand, however, **meaningful autonomy should be granted to them**. Their religious, linguistic and cultural identity should be protected. Their socio-economic opportunities should be enhanced. They should be given due rights like the other dignified citizens in the context of a more equitable, humane and compassionate way of development. The ASEAN community should rise as a consistent force in its efforts to promote regional peace, inter-religious tolerance, and prosperity of the human race.

25. It is Malaysia's honour and privilege to **help broker the signing of the Framework Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)**. Malaysia also assisted the Thai government in stabilising security and improving socio-economic development through bilateral cooperation.

26. Related to this, it is **important to establish and strengthen governmental institutions and NGOs which are dedicated to long-term peace-building and peace-development efforts**. The aim and objective is to establish peaceful relations in our multi-religious society at the grass roots level with procedures to avoid further conflicts. It is imperative that we undertake conciliation, arbitration, and conflict transformation and resolution efforts. This may involve restorative justice and healing, as well as recovery and post-traumatic aid. Allah says in the Holy Al-Quran, **Surah Al- Maidah verses 8 :**

“Do not allow your hatred for other men lead you into sin deviating from justice. Deal justly (with all people), for justice is closest to God-consciousness. And remain conscious of Allah, for truly Allah is Ever-Aware of all that you do.”

27. At this point, it must be noted that these **three imperatives must be undertaken within a cohesive framework of Islam**, which promotes a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for progress and development.

28. By adopting the *wasatiyyah* or the approach of moderation, I believe that we can help to renew the spirit and vigour of Islamic communities, producing a Muslim ummah that is at home in the modern world, yet firmly rooted in the worldview and practice of Islam. Only

then can Islamic communities begin to reclaim their legacy as active players in ASEAN and the global arena.

Ladies and gentlemen,

29. Clearly, the challenge for ASEAN Muslims is tremendous. However, playing the role of a regional player is not something completely new to Muslims. We have played that very role, centuries ago, when Pasai, Malacca, Ampel and Aceh functioned as the great conveyor belts of knowledge, which saved and transmitted universal wisdom and sciences to this part of the world. And I believe we have it within ourselves to play an active role in a more dynamic ASEAN once more, *insha' Allah*.

30. On that note, with the recitation of *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*, it is now my honour and privilege to declare open the **IKIM International Symposium on “Islam and the New Era of ASEAN Countries.”**

Thank you,

Wassalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.