

DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK
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GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES CONFERENCE

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Your Royal Highness, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests.

I am delighted to join all of you today at the very first conference of the Global Movement of the Moderates – I know many of you have travelled thousands of miles to be here, and I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to our common cause. We have a saying in Malaysia, *tak kenal maka tak cinta*, which means “we can’t love what we don’t know” – and it is my sincere hope that over the next few days we will come to both know and love each other better, and to put that mutual empathy and understanding into the service of facing down extremism in all its forms.

Here in Malaysia, moderation has always been our chosen path. It is a testament to how we gained our independence from the British back in 1957; how we restored our relations with Indonesia in 1965; and how we helped build ASEAN in 1967, recovered from the tragic events of May 1969, engaged with China in 1972, and forged the ground-breaking ASEAN security and economic communities in 1993 and 2009. Each was a significant moment for our country, and all were gained through reasoned discussion and debate.

But over and above Malaysia’s own achievements, moderation is the *fitrah*, or essence, of humanity’s greatest heights; the solid bedrock on which all of the world’s civilisations have been built – for without it, we would long ago have succumbed to epicurean pleasures and delights! Yet moderation stands not just in the defence of willpower, discipline and restraint but of acceptance, freedom, tolerance, compassion, justice and peace.

Being moderate is not about being weak, about appeasement or about institutionalising mediocrity. And it is not about doing half-heartedly those things that are worthy of our fullest measure of devotion. Far from being an ideology of enfeeblement, as some would have us believe, moderation empowers us to go forward and to leave a mark for good – attending to the needs, frustrations and anxieties of others at the same time as attending to our own.

In the words of Robert F. Kennedy, “it is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the current we are here to build today – and let us make no mistake,

we come together at a particularly troubled juncture in our global history. New faces of war, the global financial crisis and natural disasters on a previously unseen scale present us with challenges the like of which we have never had to face before. But face them we must, and the way we choose to deal with these changes will have a crucial bearing on the future of our shared civilisation.

The scale and speed of the events that unfolded across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 at times felt almost overwhelming, but as the chaos and confusion gives way to calm the whole world is united in the hope that – rather than falling victim to an extremism and intolerance that closes in to fill the void – these countries and peoples can forge a peaceful, democratic moderation that will grant them more freedom of expression, not less.

Elsewhere, Nigeria has recently borne witness to deadly clashes between its Christian and Muslim communities. But the Nigerian government has made it quite clear that such behaviour will not stand and that there will be consequences for those who seek to hijack faith for violent ends. Because the real divide is not between Muslims and non-Muslims, or between the developed and developing worlds, it is between moderates and extremists.

So we have, each one of us, a choice to make: the choice between animosity and suspicion on the one hand and a sustained attempt to apprehend each other's world views on the other. Certainly, we should never assume that the oceans and gulfs that divide us grant us immunity to the conflicts of others. Tensions in Africa or harsh words uttered in the Americas can have consequences not only for those who live there but for us all. In today's world of the information superhighway such conflicts travel quickly – and no-one has a monopoly on truth.

Of course – much as it would be nice to claim the credit! – calls such as my own for a Global Movement of the Moderates are nothing new. Moderation is an age-old value, and one that runs right to the heart of the great religions. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad counsels that “moderation is the best of actions”; in Christianity, the Bible says “let your moderation be known unto all men”; and in Judaism, the Torah teaches that moderation in all things is a “way of life” in the truest sense of Jewish custom.

But if moderation has long had a home within the world religions, then the reverse is also true: extremism has never been welcome inside our mosques, churches, synagogues and temples. Perpetuating hatred is, by its very nature, a lonely pursuit, flying in the face of widely held morality – and it is this dangerously untethered animus, coupled with a head-in-the-sand refusal to acknowledge the views and the values of others, that makes extremism such a potent threat.

And yet, time and again the side of righteousness has triumphed. History has been made not by those who espoused extremism but by those who, without surrendering their beliefs, stayed true to the path of moderation. We are all familiar with the extraordinary strength of will and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, but you don't have to be a world leader to be an inspiration. Moderates can make a difference wherever they make a stand – and it is time for the massed ranks of the moderates everywhere to stand up and to say to the extremists with a single breath a firm, resounding “no”.

Because one thing is clear: we cannot rid the world of extreme views by force. Violence begets violence – so we can best foster tolerance and understanding not by silencing the voice of hatred but by making the voice of reason louder. Persuasion, negotiation and co-operation: these must be our weapons in the face of enmity and malice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The range of speakers and delegates here today is diverse in every sense, embracing experts and thought leaders from all continents and walks of life. This can, I think, mean just one thing: that extremism has at some point affected every country, every profession and everyone. No-one is immune, nowhere is out of bounds and nothing is off limits – for the simple reason that extremists, with their totalising world views, are reluctant to leave any institution, sacred or secular, untouched.

Extremists, we know, are driven by orthodoxies – a set of messianic ideals characterised by crass simplifications, misrepresentations and outright lies. Rather than celebrating the sanctity of life, as is required by all religions, extremists emphasise the glory of the afterlife. Rather than seeking out and embracing difference they espouse ignorance, intolerance and introspection. And rather than embracing change they fear it and all who drive it, turning their backs on progress and seeking refuge in an idealised world that always stays the same.

The essence, and perhaps the attraction, of extremism is its apparent simplicity – so it falls to movements and gatherings like this one to interrogate these easy truisms with subtlety, intelligence and vigour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talk of extremism and extremist acts conjures up terrible images of murder, mayhem and human suffering, but extremism isn't always violent – and I believe we literalise it at our peril. Take, for example, one of the most extreme yet ostensibly non-violent events in recent history: the global financial crisis.

Compared to the shockingly violent images that were beamed around the world in the wake of 9/11 – scenes of devastation on an epic scale that scarred a generation and seared the collective conscience of the world – the pictures taken outside Lehman Brothers on another September morning some years later were much more ordinary, familiar even. A young woman, tense and anxious, carries her belongings out of the firm's headquarters in a box. A disgraced executive, walking quickly, climbs into his luxury car and speeds away.

Nothing too unusual or untoward – and yet, without a single bullet fired, the extremes and excesses of Wall Street would in a matter of days take the world as we knew it to the brink.

Fast forward four years and it is clear there is no end in sight. The eurozone is still in crisis. Countless millions have lost their jobs, their homes and their security. And in addition to the human cost, some US\$14 trillion has so far been spent on the rescue plan – ten times the cost of the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq combined.

So if my call for moderation is idealistic, it is hard-headedly realistic too. Many great Islamic scholars have been concerned with how Islam as a religious, cultural, political, ethical and economic worldview can help solve some of the biggest challenges we face today, and these are also questions that interest me – how moderation can solve not only the problem of violent extremism but can guide us through this global economic crisis.

Thomas Jefferson once said that “the selfish spirit of commerce knows no country, and feels no passion of principle but that of gain.” It is a sentiment that has been revisited many times in the years and months since Lehman’s fell.

No less a figure than the Pope has blamed the global financial crisis on “the lack of a solid ethical foundation for economic activity.” Britain’s Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written of the need for employers, bankers and shareholders to be “guided, even if no-one is watching, by a sense of what is responsible and right.” And for Muslims like myself, the structures and principles of Islamic finance have long put public good ahead of individual gain.

So how do we create a truly moderate global economy that works in the interests of the many not the few? How can we devise a system that delivers fairness for “the 99 per cent”, not just those at the top? Quite simply, we can no longer allow the workings of the markets to be value-free or value-neutral. Markets, we all know, are the only route to rising global prosperity and sustained, stable growth – but we must do away with the unjust, unfair outcomes they can produce when left unchecked, and with the kinds of reckless economic practices that brought our global financial system to its knees.

Massive overleveraging. Mind-boggling credit default swaps. Subprime lending. Like the monstrous creation of some crazy scientist, these new and poorly understood financial practices rampaged out of Wall Street and left the devastated lives of millions in their wake.

But what of the men and women, the bankers and the traders, who went about their work with such abandon and with so little thought for anything beyond their own enrichment? A line of mug shots of the culprits would look very different to the “rogues gallery” of extremists we have grown accustomed to in recent years – sharp-suited, desk bound and clean shaven rather than dark skinned, bearded and combat-trained.

This flies in the face of everything we have been told about extremism – but it also raises the important question: what do extremists look like? How can we come to know them? The answer, of course, is that extremists, like extremism itself, take many forms – and we can only know them by their acts.

It is something I believe the world would do well to remember, for too often in recent times we have seen extremism and Islam discussed in the same breath. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, Southeast Asia came to be regarded as a 'second front' simply because it had the highest number of Muslims in the world. And yet terrorism has never gained the same grip here that it has secured in other parts of the world.

And when a great evil visited Norway last year, so-called experts filled the airwaves to assert that the attack bore all the hallmarks of Muslim extremists. We swiftly discovered that the awful truth was very different, yet around the world politicians, journalists and commentators remain committed to the idea that terrorism and Islam are two sides of the same coin.

After Timothy McVeigh brought mass slaughter to the streets of Oklahoma City, nobody suggested that all Christians were somehow responsible. To do so would rightly have been seen as absurd, yet that is the situation the world's 1.3 billion Muslims find themselves in today.

How did this happen? How did acts of extremism by a tiny minority of Muslims come to be seen as a true reflection of the whole of the Islamic faith – and to overshadow the extremism that is being perpetrated right across the world, day in day out, by people of all faiths and none? Such pernicious views cannot be left unchallenged – and it is not enough to say, as many have done, that the solution to extremism is simply for more Muslims to speak up and speak out. We need to hear from moderates of all religions in all countries and from all walks of life – and when we do, the prize of peace is there for all to see.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Malaysia has long been synonymous not with extremism but with moderation, tolerance, inclusivity and even acceptance.. In a predominantly Muslim country with substantial communities of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Taoists and Sikhs, we know well the “dignity of difference”. We have many ethnic groups, many religions, but we continually strive to be a harmonious and truly united nation predicated on the values of moderation and the spirit of 1Malaysia.

We know that we are best and we are strongest when we actively embrace our differences rather than just putting up with them – and it is in that spirit that we come together at the first ever meeting of the Global Movement of the Moderates. But a truly global movement cannot be imposed from above – so we must awaken in all our countries and communities the triumph of truth over ignorance, falsehood and fear.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To advance our common cause, I am pleased to announce today the formation here in Malaysia of an Institute of Wasatiyyah, operating as part of the Prime Minister's Office, to further the pursuit of

moderation and balance in all its aspects – respect for democracy, the rule of law, education, human dignity and social justice. In the words of the great scholar Al-Imam Ibnul Qayyim, wasatiyyah – moderation or ‘balance’ – “neither being too lenient nor too extreme is like an oasis between two mountains”, and to encourage many more such scholars in the future we will also be creating an academic Chair of Wasatiyyah, operating under Universiti Malaya, with the postholder to be announced in due course.

To spearhead this work at an international level, I am delighted to announce the launch of a new Global Movement of the Moderates Foundation as a centre of first resort for the consolidation and dissemination of information and campaign materials to all those who want to join the fight against extremism, governmental and non-governmental bodies alike. Certainly it is essential that, rather than being an exclusive initiative by Malaysia, the GMM complements other initiatives for global dialogue and co-operation such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations.

It will not be a campaign for the faint hearted, but we cannot allow this moment to be overtaken by extremists, with those who shout loudest gaining the most. In the words of that great advocate for peace, Mahatma Gandhi, “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind” – so it is for moderates everywhere to stand firm and stand proud, to dissipate the pull of the extremes and to deny those at the margins a foothold on the middle ground, ensuring that frustrations, wherever they are felt, are heeded and that voices, wherever they speak out, are heard.

Certainly, I hope this inaugural conference will provide an opportunity for us to brainstorm, debate and explore some of the practical challenges ahead – questions like: What does it take for a set of ideas and values to become a truly global movement? How can we inject moderation into our foreign policy decisions and domestic economic measures? And what can we learn from each other in the promotion of understanding, tolerance and peace?

Ladies and gentlemen

Maybe I am naïve to hope for a world without terror, intolerance and all of the hatreds and miseries that man inflicts on man – but the price of failure if we dream too small is simply too high to pay. So let us dare to dream big, let us dare to imagine what was once thought unimaginable, and yes, let us dare to answer the clarion call to action. Oppression and tyranny can only win out if good men and women stand idly by, unwilling to turn rhetoric into action and opinions into deeds.

So let us here, today, together, commit ourselves to change and begin the task of building a new coalition of the moderates for our times – and may I thank you once again for coming and wish you well in your discussions over the next few days. There has never been a more important conversation, and it is one that we must undertake with temperance, fortitude and courage.