

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

Venue : **PICC, Putrajaya**

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Title : **MAJLIS PERASMIAN SEMINAR ANTARABANGSA AUTISME MALAYSIA (ISAM)**
2014

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,

Her Excellency Datin Sri Rosmah Mansor

Patron of the International Seminar of Autisme,

Her Excellencies First Ladies of the Republic of Sudan, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Kyrgyz Republic, Albania and Morocco,

The Honourable Tan Sri Dato' Haji Muhyiddin bin Haji Mohd. Yassin

Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and

Puan Sri Datin Paduka Norainee binti Haji Abdul Rahman,

Representative of the First Ladies of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, China, Singapore and Namibia.

The Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers and wife

Your Excellencies Ambassadors,

Senior Government Officials,

Speakers, Delegates, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Firstly, on behalf of the government of Malaysia, I would like to welcome all participants to the first ever international seminar on autism held in this country. Special warm welcome to all First Ladies and representatives of First Ladies. I have been informed that this seminar is well- attended by more than 150 international participants from 30 countries and together with more than 1,000 local participants. I believe that this rather enthusiastic response to today's seminar is a reflection of the rise of awareness and interest on autism as it is one of the fastest growing developmental disorder.

2. Therefore, it is very timely that we come together for this seminar so that we can not only raise the level of awareness but more importantly to educate ourselves, to do something about it, on how to address the challenges that come with this growing affliction.

3. I am sure that a number of speakers at this seminar will highlight the important fact that autism prevalence is on the rise at an alarming rate. Apparently, we don't have the complete statistic, but in advanced nations, from three to four cases for every ten thousand births, the prevalence is now one for every 68 births. No doubt, these increase incidents will have a profound impacts on the well-being of families and nations.

I am confident that we will also be reminded of the economic impact that autism place on the nation.

4. Research has found that for every child who has not learn to be independent during the formal schooling years, the cost of providing lifelong support to them will be tripled. I am sure the speakers at this seminar will touch on the adverse impacts of autism on the lives of children and individuals who lives with it, and their families.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. In light of this phenomenal rise of autism globally, countries are reacting to it proactively with prescriptive national action plans on how to set up a comprehensive early intervention system, supporting and empowering families, and ensuring sufficient supply of specially create professionals in this field. Malaysia aspires to follow suit and we intend to construct our first ever National Centre for Autism which is scheduled to be in operation by May 2015.

6. It is important to note that Malaysia aims to become a fully developed nation by the year 2020 and to achieve this aim, one of our objectives that we have agreed, is to ensure inclusive education, in the sense children with disabilities will receive education in the same manner as their typically developing peers.

7. Inclusive education is a major part of the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Children and the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Malaysia has ratified both declarations because we truly believe that every child has the right to education, and every child has the right to be successful and in return able to contribute back to the society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. In the case of children with learning disabilities, we should not look at it as a tragedy. Instead, tragedy occurs when we continue to ignore the rights and needs of children with learning disabilities. In another words, it becomes a tragedy because of ignorance, because of neglect, because of denial, because we fail to do something about it.

Children with autism, just like any other children, are a blessing and gifts from almighty God and it is our moral responsibility to nurture them, to realize their fullest potential.

9. In Malaysia, this project is aptly named “PERMATA Kurnia”. In Malay, ‘permata’ means jewel, and ‘kurnia’ means gift. Let us commit ourselves to give our fullest support to the children with autism and other learning difficulties.

With proper infrastructure, right curriculum, children with autism along with their typically developing peers will be an asset to the nation and their families in the future.

10. In order to tackle this issue from the perspective of the education system, the Malaysian government lead by the Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has developed the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. From this blueprint, we can say that the first paradigm is to provide equal access to quality education.

Within this paradigm, one of the key determinants of student’s outcome is to raise the quality of all preschools and ensure that, and this is national objective, every child will enjoy pre-school education by 2020.

11. This is in line with the UNESCO Salamanca Statement made in 1994 whereby it affirmed the commitment to “Education for All” and recognized the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Following this, among the planned actions to achieve this outcome is to ensure that every child aged 5 will be enrolled in a registered preschool, be it public or private. All preschools will follow a set of national quality standards, including a provision that every preschool teacher will have a minimum diploma qualification. A great benefit for this policy will be early identification of any learning disability, be it autism or other forms of disability, as only through early identification will lead to high chance of success in education.

13. Another relevant standard for student outcome is to increase investment in physical and teaching resources for students with specific needs. Students with physical or learning disabilities will receive more support in order to level the playing field. By 2025, these students will all go to school with special features and equipment needed to create a conducive and supportive learning environment.

14. These action plans with regards to early childhood education and special education as mentioned in the Malaysian Education Blueprint, specifically for children with autism, will be spearheaded through PERMATA Kurnia. This new centre will be able to provide early intervention and early childhood special education to 300 children with autism aged between 2-6 years. I would like to see this autism centre not only to be a centre, but I would like to declare this as a National Centre of Excellence for Autism. It will gather expertise for early intervention and collaborate with all other centres around the world.

15. PERMATA Kurnia will be the first ever project for children with disabilities to be fully funded by the government.

It will also be the first ever project where a multidisciplinary team, consisting of early educators, speech therapists and occupational therapists work together to provide a holistic service to children with autism. This project will serve as a benchmark in implementing autism service-provision best practices which we hope will be a model for future centres.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. I am confident that PERMATA Kurnia will change the landscape of special education in Malaysia. For this foresightedness in recognizing the needs of children with autism and their families and formulating the solution that is PERMATA Kurnia, I acknowledge and salute the hard work and focus that the First Lady and her army of dedicated advocates go through to make this project a reality.

17. It is my fervent hope that this seminar will achieve its objective of raising the awareness of our society on autism and assist the participants in forming collaborative networks among each other for the betterment of providing care to children with autism and their families. Raising awareness alone is not enough, we would like to see professionals, policy makers, teachers and parents to walk away from this seminar with increased knowledge, skills and able to make a difference in the life of each child with autism that they come across.

Thank you.