

**IKIM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION
SUSTAINABILITY**

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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and good afternoon.

Salam 1 Malaysia.

YA.Bhg.Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi

Chairman, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM)

YB. Major-General Dato' Seri Jamil Khir Baharom (Rtd.)

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department

YBhg. Professor Datuk Dr. Azizan Baharuddin

Director-General, IKIM

Speakers of the conference, 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 take this opportunity to congratulate the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) for its initiative in organising this International Conference on "Religion and Civilizational Sustainability".
3. I would also like to thank IKIM for inviting me to officiate at this conference being held in conjunction with its 25th anniversary.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Let us begin by considering the title of this conference – Religion and Civilizational Sustainability. We are familiar with the three concepts – religion, civilization and sustainability.

5. In this part of the world, it can be assumed that all of us here are in favour of all three. But too often, we think of them separately. Whereas, in fact, all three are linked. In some ways this is obvious.

6. A civilization that was not sustainable, for instance, could not last. For if it was not sustainable, it would be sowing the seeds of its own destruction. One could also say that a civilization that was not sustainable – that is, was not taking proper care of its people, its values and its environment – would not be worthy of the name.

7. Civilization is an achievement. It is not a term that can be bestowed on any group of people living in a particular land at one time or another. It is a term that has to be earned.

8. Sustainability, on the other hand, is a course of action that more and more countries are pursuing now – but not simply because the arguments of environmentalists have been so persuasive. That is part of the story, and we all know that during our own lifetimes the way we consider our natural resources world has changed considerably – and for the better.

9. But we have even more compelling reasons for making sustainability an integral part of our lives, our Governments and our international relations. For religion demands that we do.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. Let me give you the example of a well known hadith, in which the Prophet Muhammad said that even if the Hour of Judgment Day is about to occur, plant a tree. He also prohibited poisoning wells and cutting trees for no reason.

11. What greater evidence can we summon to demonstrate that Islam insists that we humans are responsible for caring for all that sustains earthly life? This hadith teaches us that we are to do this not only until the end of our individual lives, but also till the Last Day—the end of our collective existence on earth.
12. Our responsibility extends to all life on earth, not only human life. For as God created us in His image – a notion also mentioned in the Bible, and thus a belief we Muslims share with Christians and Jews – so man’s role on earth echoes God’s role.
13. And just as God and the Prophet teach us that God created and continues to sustain the world, as God’s khalifahs, we too have to discharge our role in sustaining life on earth.
14. This term describing humankind, khalifah, comes from the Quranic story depicting God’s announcement to the angels that He was creating a human being. He described this human, Adam, as His khalifah, which means successor. Being God’s “successor” conveys the idea that Man is God’s representative or ambassador, His agent on earth.
15. Similar is the biblical notion of man being God’s steward on earth – and that is a good way to consider this idea. Man’s role therefore, while enjoying the earth’s bounty, is to take care of it, and to take care of all life: vegetative life, animal life and human life.
16. But our duty is not only to take care of it, to heal it, and to nurture it; it is also to ensure that it thrives. This idea is derived from Maqasid al-Shari`a, the objectives of Islamic law, which summarise the Quranic and Hadith commandments. These are the protection of life, religion, property, intellect, family and dignity.
17. Muslim scholars of the past century have added the importance of furthering these objectives to that of their mere protection.
18. So it is our responsibility not only to protect life from crime, war, epidemic diseases and other afflictions, but also to further it – quantitatively, for example, by expanding provision of health care that lengthens people’s lives, and qualitatively, by providing for an enhanced quality of life.

19. The natural result of protecting and furthering these objectives means that any society that does so is on the path towards civilization – a state in which quality of life, religious philosophy and practice, and intellectual development are all supported and cherished.
20. What is Malaysia’s role in all this? Malay Muslims have long been regarded as an exemplar of moderate Muslims. This is why Tun Abdullah here championed “Civilizational Islam”, a translation of the Arabic al-Islam al-hadari, hadarah being the Arabic term for civilization, because the values of a civilization are what sustain it.
21. This is why I have championed moderation – or wasatiyyah – as the path of the best, for moderation is the path of human perfection, an idea that is taught to us by Islam as well as all other religions.
22. Wasatiyyah carries the message of doing good with steadfastness, justice, brotherhood and righteousness, as well as the rejection of all forms of evil such as extremism.
23. It also enables us to see religion as something that unites us, rather than divides us. In Malaysia we have Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus and members of other faiths. Our hearts are gladdened when our fellow countrymen of other faith celebrate their festivals, and we wish them well.
24. In the past two months alone we have had Thaipusam, Chinese New Year and Christmas. They are joyful occasions and public holidays, signifying the importance we have always placed on our diversity, and on religion.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

25. The Malaysian Government takes our role as khalifah very seriously. Sustainability is one of the three pillars of the New Economic Model we announced in 2010.

26. And I'm proud to be able to say that under the Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2011-2015, we achieved a 33 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emission intensity, compared to 2005 levels.
27. The household recycling rate rose to 15 percent, compared to 5 percent in 2010.
28. We passed the Renewable Energy Act, and renewable energy installed capacity grew from 53 megawatts in 2009 to 243 megawatts in 2014.
29. Nearly a million people have been shielded from the detrimental effects of floods through the implementation of 194 flood mitigation projects.
30. 23,264 hectares of forested areas were declared as Permanent Reserved Forest under the Central Forest Spine initiative, helping to protect our country's natural beauty and diversity. Forest cover also grew to 61 percent in 2014, up from 56 percent in 2010.
31. We established the Green Technology Council and the Malaysia Green Building Confederation to promote sustainability. We launched the Green Technology Financing Scheme, including US \$470 million in soft loans to help create a policy environment that would attract innovators and promote the use of green technology.
32. And we set a target of increasing the GDP contribution from green business from 2 percent to 8 percent by 2020 – which would create another 400,000 jobs.
33. The Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2016-2020, goes even further.
34. We want greenhouse gas emissions to be down by fully 40 percent compared to 2005 levels.
35. We aim to increase household recycling to 22 percent.
36. We have set a target of 2 million people to be protected through flood mitigation projects; and for 10 percent of coastal and marine areas to be gazetted as protected, and 17 percent of terrestrial and inland areas to be gazetted protected as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. The Government intends to lead by example. We have set ourselves the aim of at least 20 percent of government procurement being designated “green” by the end of the plan.

38. Green growth is one of the six strategic thrusts identified in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. It should be a game-changer for Malaysia to reach high income nation status.

39. And we have set out plans to do the following:

40. Strengthen the enabling environment for green growth.

41. Adopt the sustainable consumption and production concept.

42. Conserve natural resources for present and future generations; and

43. Strengthen our resilience against climate change and natural disasters.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

44. Here in Malaysia we have provided concrete support for the concept of moderation, not least through the creation of the Wasatiyyah Institute and the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation.

45. If the power of religion is to be harnessed to send the message that it is a religious duty to promote sustainability, and that a true civilization is one that has sustainability at its core, we must be sure that peoples of different faiths are talking to each other, discussing what we have in common, and ensuring that we are as one in fighting extremism and radicalisation.

46. Bringing people together is key. We do not want scientists and experts to present their research, but then keep their work and conclusions in a separate silo from the religious scholars.

47. When I see the list of papers being presented today and tomorrow I can see that this conference is exactly about bridging that divide, and I commend the organisers for all their efforts to draw such a distinguished collection of speakers here to Kuala Lumpur.

48. These kind of discussions are true to the greatest period of scholarship in Islamic history, when the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, Harun al-Rashid, and his son al-Ma'mun, created the greatest centre of learning the world had ever seen – the Bayt al Hikma, or House of Wisdom.

49. As the Iraqi-British scientist, Professor Jim al-Khalili, has put it:

- “From 10th century Persia came Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, a polymath who outshines everyone in history except Leonardo da Vinci. It was the manuscripts of the Syrian astronomer Ibn al-Shatir that later inspired Copernicus’s heliocentric model of the solar system.

- The Andalusian physician Ibn al-Nafees correctly described blood circulation before William Harvey. And the ninth century zoologist al-Jahith, who moved to Baghdad soon after the House of Wisdom was founded, developed a theory of natural selection a thousand years before Charles Darwin.”

50. These are examples to inspire us, and I am sure that a wealth of thoughts and ideas will emerge from your discussions at this Conference. I look forward to hearing about and learning from your experiences.

51. For the visitors from abroad, I do hope you will have time to enjoy our capital city and see more of our wonderful country – and if you don’t this time, we hope to welcome you back before long.

52. I am also delighted that three publications, on the theme of sustainable development, ASEAN, and the environment, will be launched today. These will undoubtedly enhance our understanding of the issues.

53. And finally, the relationship between religion, sustainability and civilization itself is something that we must discuss more widely, and highlight as we set the course of developing our nation in the future.

54. This conference will surely make a great contribution to that debate.

55. On that note, and with the recitation of Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, it is now my great pleasure and privilege to declare open this International Conference on “Religion and Civilizational Sustainability”, and to celebrate IKIM’s 25th anniversary and the launch of its latest publications.

Thank you, Wassalamu’alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

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