

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE 18TH EAROPH WORLD PLANNING  
CONGRESS, AT SHANGRILA HOTEL  
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Thank you for inviting me to officially launch the 18th EAROPH World Planning Congress. I bid a warm welcome to all delegates and participants.

2. This is the third time that Malaysia has hosted this event, illustrating our commitment to the organisation. We firmly believe that EAROPH plays a valuable role in providing a platform for public and private entities, academics as well as NGOs to work in partnership. The exchange of insights and ideas is an important component of the policy-making process. Through this cooperative framework, we hope to address the important issues of provision of shelter, eradication of poverty and improving the quality of life.

3. I would also like to congratulate EAROPH Malaysia under the leadership of Datuk Peter Chin, for their efforts in organising this august event and their continuing role in carrying out the work of EAROPH in this country.

4. The world is becoming increasingly urbanised and cities around the world are experiencing explosive growth. The 21st century is said to be the first "urban century", because for the first time in history, more than 50% of the global population live in cities. I have been made to understand that United Nations projections indicate the proportion of people living in urban areas will rise from 47% in 2000 to over 61% by 2005. The trend in Malaysia is very much consistent with these figures - the percentage of our urban population is projected to reach 75% by 2020.

5. Viewed realistically, migration to urban centres will continue unchecked, for the simple reason that the bulk of social and economic activity is concentrated in cities. People will continue to gravitate towards places where opportunities for employment and socio-economic betterment can be found.

6. The effect of burgeoning metropolitan populations is that immense pressures are placed upon the infrastructure and public services in cities. Civic systems creak under the strain caused by the mass of humanity. The lack of adequate housing leads to the mushrooming of unsightly squatter communities. Poor access to sanitation cause the spread of sickness and disease. Inefficient public transportation results in gridlock on the streets, diminishing the efficiency of the economy. Crumbling and decrepit inner cities become the breeding ground for crime, drug abuse and other social ills. Pollution and other forms of environmental degradation continue unabated.

7. The challenge, therefore, is to raise the quality of life apace with the increase in population. Cities should be places for people to work and play in equal measure. Cities should provide an environment where all inhabitants can equitably share economic, technological and social progress. Cities should thrive on cultural diversity and preserve, as far as possible the sanctity of the environment. Cities should feature a synthesis of the practical and the aesthetic.

8. Of course, providing for this utopian vision is a daunting task and would be much easier if planners were given the opportunity to start from a clean slate, as they did with Malaysia's new administrative centre in Putrajaya. However, in most cases work must be done within the constraints of existing infrastructure and legacy systems. Nonetheless, the challenge of making urban environments liveable is one that must be grasped firmly, because cities play an important role in housing the engines of economic growth and providing the bedrock of social stability.

9. The scarcity of resources and lack of capacity, particularly among planners in developing countries is a major impediment. In this connection, an organisation such as EAROPH can play a pivotal role. I am heartened to note that its activities include arranging programs that seek to build capacity through technical assistance, technology transfers and the sourcing of funding. These activities should be continued and indeed, intensified. Good intentions and well-laid plans can only be implemented effectively if capacity is built and resources are made available. Otherwise, any ambitions will remain forlorn and unfulfilled.

10. To combat the problems that confront us, we must begin by efficiently harnessing the tools that are available to us. The theme for this year's Congress is "Innovative Technologies for Good Governance." It is a theme that is particularly apt, in light of the profound impact that technological progress has had on all our lives. Advances in information and communication technology have broadened and democratised information flows. Essentially, it empowers anyone with an idea and access to the appropriate equipment to share their point of view with a broader audience.

11. Increasing democratisation provides a challenge to planners and local authorities, but its impact should be viewed positively. Policy-making cannot and should not exist in a vacuum. It should be a participatory and consultative process, where the inputs of all stakeholders, upon whom these policies will impact, should be conveyed effectively and taken into consideration.

12. In this regard, the application of technology can improve the efficiency of services. For instance, in Malaysia, the Government has long realized that electronic government, or e-government, offers an excellent platform for promoting good governance. It has been given added prominence as a flagship application of the Multimedia SuperCorridor initiative. Through e- government applications, agencies responsible for planning, especially local authorities have embarked on projects to further improve the quality and efficacy of the services they provide to the public, including for planning purposes.

13. Through E-networking and improved communications, policy making, activities such as data collection and dealing with complaints can be made seamless. Response times are slashed and programs can be designed more flexibly. Thus, implementation can become even more broad- based, participatory and transparent. Ultimately, the process becomes more responsive and efficient.

14. The provision of adequate, decent and affordable shelter represents an urgent socio-economic issue that must be addressed. Housing needs have become more pressing for the low-income group, particularly in large urban centers. Urban centers all over the world are experiencing rapid population growth, accentuated by the continuing influx of migrants from the rural areas and from smaller towns in search of better economic and social opportunities. This has exerted pressure and further

constraints on the part of the Local and State Governments to provide affordable housing, including for sections of the populace living in squatter settlements.

15. Again, the use of better technology might provide an answer. For example, one solution is to invest in research and development activities related to the production of cost effective building methods and materials. From Malaysia's experience, universities and the private sector can play a significant role by developing and adopting better construction techniques and life costing estimation of multi-storey housing. As a measure to overcome the problem of construction defects as well as to protect the house buyers, a quality assessment system of construction can be introduced. In addition, standard plans for low cost housing should also be put in place to reduce costs and to provide a better degree of comfort to the occupants.

16. Malaysia is committed to these initiatives. Under the 8th Malaysia Plan, which covers the period 2001 to 2005, the government will establish the Malaysian Human Settlement and Urbanization Research Institute (MAHSURI) to conduct R&D on issues related to human settlement and urbanization. This will include housing design and technology, especially in relation to technical research on alternative building materials and industrialised building systems.

17. The recently concluded World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg brought into focus the importance of achieving the delicate equilibrium between economic development, social development and environmental protection. Striking an appropriate balance should be the principle determinant when formulating planning policies. We must be able to design and execute plans that meet our needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

18. With this in mind, I hope that your deliberations today will be fruitful and productive. Ideally, you will be able to evolve new ideas, particularly relating to the use of appropriate technologies to meet the challenges facing all of us. At the same time, do reflect and assess the extent to which past findings and resolutions have been successfully implemented. Deliberation and discourse will be meaningless unless concrete action matches rhetoric.

19. On this note, I have great pleasure in launching the 18th EAROPH World Planning Congress.

Thank you.