

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
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Thank you for inviting me to be part of this initiative of lifelong learning which has now become a global agenda. I am glad to be here today at the International Conference of Lifelong Learning which is part of the ASEM Lifelong Learning Initiative.

2. There are various definitions given by scholars and various organizations engaged in the field of lifelong learning. Scholars and organizations have interpreted lifelong learning as a paradigm, a principle, a process, an attitude, a platitude, a form of capital and a means of status maintenance. It was argued also that in an era of continuous economic change there is a new and emerging market for all forms of continuing education and professional or vocational competence. Even in Malaysia, new markets for basic further, higher and continuing education and training are evolving. Everybody, I may be wrong in having this assumption, has started to see the importance to be equipped with capabilities of learning, specifically, knowing how to learn. Have we arrived or are we still grasping with the realities of life, and in the process hamper our passion and desire to become lifelong learners?

3. The Malaysian Government in our Third Outline Perspective Plan tabled by our Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on 3 April 2000 at the Parliament recognized the importance of Lifelong Learning. Lifelong learning will and is becoming increasingly important in the knowledge-based economy where knowledge and skills need to be continuously updated and upgraded. New skills and expertise will be required to improve employability and productivity. The Malaysian government will take various measures to promote lifelong learning among all Malaysians, especially those without a strong basic education. We will provide them the opportunity to continue their education as well as to learn at their own pace outside the school or in the workplace.

4. The Government have initiated efforts to promote and implement programmes for lifelong learning. Affordable accessibility to training courses and education programmes through the Internet or other ICT-related media will be provided so that Malaysians have the opportunity to acquire new competencies and qualifications for career advancement. More IT kiosks and cyber centres will be set up by the Government, especially in the rural areas, to increase accessibility to education and training. In addition, the establishment of community colleges, open universities and distance education will provide avenues for Malaysians to pursue tertiary education and upgrade their skills and qualifications. The establishment of community colleges will also provide opportunities particularly to those who left the school system to join the labour market to further their education and training. Financial institutions will also be encouraged to provide soft loans to working adults to continue their education. The Employee Provident Fund provided an avenue for Malaysians to finance their own education. Employers will be encouraged to promote lifelong learning through and retraining to equip workers with new skills and knowledge so that they can keep up with the steady stream of technological advances.

5. All of us here are aware, I am sure, of the need to learn from each other. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) in one of his Hadiths mentioned, "Seek for knowledge even if you would have to go to China". We would need to look at the best practices in relation to lifelong learning. These best practices may come from any part of the world. They may come from Denmark, Finland, Singapore or Malaysia. They may also come from the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, Viet Nam and other parts of the world. The main determining factor would be our willingness to learn from each other. We would need to learn from each other to make this world a better place to live in. There should always be a willingness to share, which is something that all participants would experience for the next few days. I believe that is one of the reasons why the organisers decided to have a mix of Asian and European speakers at this conference. And we appreciate their willingness to be here and share their thoughts and expertise in their areas of specialisation. I am made to understand that there will be 24 papers to be presented in this conference. Four different panels have been identified by the organising committee for this particular conference - Enlightened Philosophies of Lifelong Learning, Accreditation of Prior Learning, Integrated Approaches to Lifelong Learning and Best Practices in Lifelong Learning. The speakers, I was made to understand, are experts in their respective areas of specialisation. I am very sure that all of us, especially the participants, and fellow speakers would benefit from all the presentations. The discussants, four of them, will also make important contributions towards the further understanding of the subject at hand.

6. Different nations in Asia have taken various steps towards the realisation of the lifelong learning agenda. In Japan, the Monbusho (Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture) promotes "the creation of a lifelong learning society in which people can learn at any stage of life, can freely select and participate in opportunities for study and can have the results of their learning appropriately evaluated. This, of course, takes into consideration that the number of elderly persons will increase from 15 million in 1990 to 33 million in 2020 and that the rapid aging of the nation's population will have a major impact on future adult education needs. In Korea, there is in place what has been named as the Credit Bank System, where one could accumulate enough credits to satisfy certain requirements, and one could then be awarded a Bachelors or an Associate Bachelors degree in the respective fields. For Malaysia, the earliest development of adult education started with the spread of Islam in the fourteenth century and other forms of adult learning include the "silat" (martial arts) and craftsman apprenticeship training. Extension education in agriculture was introduced in 1905 to provide education to farmers and their families. Basic education for the masses was introduced by the British in 1940, carried on by the Japanese a year later, and continued until after the Independence of Malaysia and finally phased out in 1970. The opportunity for tertiary education only became available locally with the establishment of the University of Malaya in 1959, this very same university that all of us are in today on this occasion.

7. There is a need for all of us involved in the pursuit of best practices and integrated approaches to lifelong learning to be flexible. We need to look at learning from a wider perspective. Italy, for example looks at learning from various phases and moments in life. The phases and moments include among others early childhood, pre-school, school age, transition from youth to adult life, introduction to social life, the labour market, going back to the schooling system (foundation learning and higher learning), updating learning while in service, self- learning, leaving the labour market, old age and beyond old age that includes learning for the end of life. This

only goes to prove that we need to inculcate lifelong learning from an early age and in that effort instil the passion for learning throughout life.

8. We should learn from life experiences and make things better. Is the world today a better place because there are lifelong learners everywhere in this world? What did we learn from the September 11 suicidal attacks? What did we learn from the actions taken by the United States of America and a host of other nations? What did we learn from the destruction of Afghanistan and the loss of thousands of innocent lives? Are we learning from the events happening at this very moment in Palestine? Did we learn anything from the massacres in Bosnia-Herzegovina and have we made sure that nothing of that sort would happen again and again? Or is history repeating itself, over and over again?

9. Recently the Ministry of Education has approved the setting up of the Malaysian Open University or Universiti Terbuka Malaysia (UNITEM) which is a joint effort through a consortium of public universities. The open university offers various courses as part of lifelong learning programs through distance learning, thus providing more opportunities for workers to pursue higher education on a part-time basis. The Ministry of Education has also set up 12 community colleges for post-secondary education. The Ministry of Human Resources has embarked on the National Skills Recognition System and the National Vocational Training Council has developed 456 National Occupational Skills Standards covering 36 major occupations in the industry including those involving new and advanced technology. The National Vocational Training Council has accredited 585 training centres, including 401 private training institutions to conduct 2824 training programs of the Malaysian Skills certificate Level 1 to Level 5. The Skills Development Fund provides financial assistance to school leavers and those already working who intend to pursue tertiary education in skills-based careers. A Human Resources Development Fund has been established to encourage and facilitate employers to retrain and upgrade the skills of the workforce through a levy/grant system. The Training Scheme for Retrenched Workers has been established to offer ICT courses at the Certificate and Diploma level to increase the supply of relevant skilled workers required by the industry. The Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) under the Ministry of Entrepreneurial Development provides vocational and skills based training. It has established the MARA Vocational Centre (Pusat Giat MARA) and the MARA Skills Institute (Institut Kemahiran MARA). The Youth Skills Training Institute (Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara) under the Ministry of Youth and Sports offers pre-employment training. The National Advanced Skills Institute (Institut Kemahiran Tinggi Belia Negara) focuses on training at a higher level. The Ministry of Rural Development through KEMAS has put in place Adult Literacy programs, Adult ICT programs and other educational programs. The Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) has its own training colleges that provide academic programs and hands-on training programs for second-generation smallholders in different parts of the nation. All these efforts collectively is prove that Malaysia has also embarked on the lifelong learning initiative although different names have been put to all these efforts.

10. In Islam, we believe that whatever we know is but a droplet of water in the ocean. There is so much to be learned. As a nation everybody would have to take up the responsibility for their own learning and thus contribute towards the prosperity and development of the nation. We should never become arrogant with the knowledge that we possess. We should make full use of our knowledge to make things better. The more knowledgeable we are, the more humble we should become. Atrocities and destructions in this world happen when people become arrogant and

blinded by their perceived power. With all the knowledge they have, they should actually be guided by the knowledge they possess. Unfortunately, they allow their senseless arrogance to do their thinking for them and thus put all the knowledge that they have to waste. We must not be like them. We must rise above all the misgivings that the world is facing today and persevere to make this world a better place to live in.

11. In the name of Allah Most Loving, Most Merciful, I humbly declare this ASEM Initiative on Lifelong Learning International Conference open.

Thank you.