

**SPEECH BY
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Syukur alhamdulillah, I am grateful to god for allowing us the opportunity to gather here today to commemorate the graduation of the final year law students of this esteemed university. This is indeed a historic occasion for those amongst us who are embarking on a new chapter in their lives.

2. I hope that you have fully availed yourself of the opportunities and privileges afforded to you while students of the IIU. They say the best days of your lives are your student days. I could not agree more. It is as students that one often has the best opportunities to expand one's horizons, build lasting friendships, engage one's intellectual curiosity and explore one's full potential.

3. The government fully encourages such inclinations among undergraduates. We realize that the world we live in today demands that graduates of tertiary institutions be not only competent and conversant in their area of study, but also creative, resourceful and dynamic individuals who are able to adapt to a multitude of different situations and requirements. They should ideally be well-rounded individuals imbued with enthusiasm, pro-active and equipped not just with the knowledge imparted to them in their respective degree courses, but also with the ability to acquire further knowledge that is not necessarily related to their area of specialisation.

4. I am particularly impressed with the philosophy of the IIU, which I believe reflects those characteristics that I have mentioned. This university was established in 1983 with the aid of OIC member countries. Its intention is to produce individuals who are balanced, well-rounded and able to play a positive role in nation-building. In other words, they are "insan kamil", in that they are able to recognise the equal importance of life in the present and temporary world, as well as in the after-life and the permanent hereafter.

5. The importance of this university's philosophy resounds ever stronger in these troubled times for Muslims around the world. There are those of us within the ummah who have such little regard for the present world that they have no qualms in sacrificing their own lives, as well as those of others, in the pursuit of what they believe is salvation in the after-life. They do not realise the cost that this brings not only to themselves but also to their fellow Muslims. Consequently, they have managed to distort the true essence of Islam. War-mongering, violence and extremism is the very antithesis of Islam. Indeed, there are few religions which imposes a greater emphasis on peace, tolerance and respect for others than Islam .

6. The events of September 11 have made the world a more difficult place to live in for Muslims. While those of us who are older will leave this temporary place in the not too distant future, it is those of you who are younger who will have to bear the heavy burden of rectifying the distorted and negative perceptions of Islam. More importantly, it is those of you who are learned who will have to lead the ummah to recapture the true essence of Islam.

7. Most of you will have realised that Islam is a powerful and for many, an intoxicating message. It is not difficult for the unscrupulous and unconscionable

amongst us to manipulate Islam to serve their own ends. For the sake of our country and the ummah, I hope and pray that all of you will be agents for preventing such radical endeavours, rather than agents for their promulgation.

8. The best way to frustrate the efforts of these extremists is to educate; not only those who are within the ummah, but also those who are outside. The most important virtue of education, particularly education that is based on Islamic precepts, is that it instils a sense of humanity. It is this sense of humanity that the universal message of Islam ultimately seeks to promote. Humanity gives meaning to our every thought and deed, and allows us to fully appreciate and value the gift of life given to us by Allah Subhana Wata'ala. God cannot have breathed life into us for no rhyme or reason. It is only by discovering humanity that we can begin the voyage of discovering him and ultimately understanding why we submit to his will.

9. The government has always laid great emphasis in education. We invest about one-fifth of the national budget on building schools and institutions of higher learning, as well as to train and pay teachers and lecturers. We have been fortunate to reap the harvest of this investment in education. Over the last 45 years since independence, we have managed, thanks to the increasing access to necessary educational infrastructure for Malaysians, to establish a large middle-class that has formed the bedrock of our rapid economic growth and the foundation for our sustained political stability.

10. The challenges of the 21st century, however, are stark. It is a truism to say that the world today is a rapidly changing place. The forces of globalisation, trade liberalisation and convergence in communications and other technology, mean that the world has become an increasingly small and competitive place. In some ways it is increasingly becoming a battle of the fittest. Multinational corporations and global marketplaces exercise an inordinate degree of influence over our lives. Some would argue that their influence exceeds those of sovereign governments. Weaknesses are instantly identified and exploited by competitors eager to acquire increased market share and other comparative advantages.

11. While the government is fully cognisant of the challenges inherent in this new age, we are constantly thinking of ways in which we can improve our competitive standing in the world. In particular, we need to continuously upgrade our human resources, which will be critical in determining whether we can succeed in our aim to attain developed nation status.

12. In this regard, the government has identified a number of growing concerns that it is seeking to actively address. While we will continue to develop and expand the physical infrastructure of education in this country, the government is now looking into ways of increasing the quality of our system of education. But we realise that it will not merely be sufficient for us to train teachers and lecturers to achieve this aim. More importantly, it is the attitude to learning of students that must change. Students must have a thirst and hunger for knowledge. They must be willing to take the initiative to equip themselves with the skills to facilitate and promote the learning process. They should not expect knowledge to be thrust upon or fed to them. Indeed, life-long and independent learning will be the prerequisite of life in the new millennium. I urge you to make reading and erudition an important habit for you and your family.

13. I am very conscious of the fact that I am addressing a room full of lawyers and budding legal hawks. Although I am greatly tempted, I will spare you my collection

of lawyer jokes. I am sure that you would have probably heard enough of them to last you a long career at the bar. It is my fervent hope, however, that those of you who do join the legal profession will observe and uphold the highest possible standards in the course of practice.

14. We are very fortunate in this country to have the legal system that we have. While some may say that it is an accident of history or a colonial legacy, let us not forget that it is us Malaysians who have had to nurture and develop the system that we inherited from the British to make it what it is today. That has been no small feat. I would like to take this opportunity to salute the judges, legal and judicial service officers, and private practitioners in the audience who have helped to make that happen.

15. But I am sure every one of us realises what a fragile and precious thing it is to have a well regarded legal system and properly functioning mechanisms for the administration of justice. We must be constantly vigilant to ensure that the institutions tasked with the responsibility for these matters remain competent, efficient, impartial and hold true to the rule of law. We know that isolated experiences of judicial or prosecutorial misconduct can completely colour the perception, not only of foreigners but also our own people, of the administration of justice in Malaysia.

16. The government for its part, realises the damage that can result from such unhappy experiences and is keen to avoid recurrences, particularly the unfounded impression that it influences judicial or prosecutorial decisions. It cannot be emphasised enough that the government respects the decisions of the courts and the prosecutorial authority and the right of every person to pursue or resist any action in a court of law.

17. I also hope that as graduates of a university that prides itself on its excellence in the area of Islamic jurisprudence, that you will be able to continue to foster the growth and development of shariah principles in our law. In particular, the government is keen to promote the practice of Islamic banking and finance, an area in which we have made great strides and are acknowledged as a global leader. This is a classic example of how the principles of Islam can be put into practice, not only to carry out god's commandment, but also for the benefit of humankind in this world.

18. In pursuing the growth and development of shariah principles, however, it is important that your approach should be guided by reason and pragmatism. Islam is not a religion of compulsion. The scope and degree of inculcation of shariah principles must take into account the nature, needs and inclinations of the society which seeks to apply those principles. Let us not become bogged down by certain issues (such as pure and unadulterated hudud), when there are many areas of our law which could be improved by the introduction and application of shariah principles. As with Rasulullah S.A.W. In his struggle to promulgate Islam, let us advance our cause one by one and focus our efforts to ensure that we succeed in each cause, rather than open up too many issues only to fail in them all.

19. Finally, I would like to wish all of you the very best in your future endeavours. Remain steadfast to your principles and let your idealism burn bright. I hope to see you in positions of influence one day, making important and positive contributions to your country and the ummah, Insha-Allah.

Thank you and good evening to all.