

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI,
ON "MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: IMAGE AND REALITY"
AT PWTC, KUALA LUMPUR
4 AUGUST 2004**

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ORGANIZERS FOR INVITING ME TO SAY A FEW WORDS AT THIS CONFERENCE. ITS CENTRAL THEME - 'MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN 21ST CENTURY: IMAGE AND REALITY' IS INDEED TIMELY. MUSLIMS TODAY ARE FACING SOME OF THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES TO THEIR WELL-BEING AND TO THEIR PLACE IN THE GLOBAL ORDER.

2. THE EARLY PHASE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY WAS A PERIOD OF OPTIMISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD AS THE SHACKLES OF COLONIALISM WERE BROKEN. THERE WAS HOPE OF THE DAWNING OF A NEW ERA, IN WHICH WE WOULD BE MASTERS OF OUR OWN DESTINY. WE WERE CONFIDENT THAT WE WOULD BE ABLE TO CREATE A NEW REALITY. WE UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS REALITY WOULD TAKE DIFFERENT POLITICAL FORMS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE MUSLIM WORLD. BUT WHATEVER THE FORMS THEY TOOK, WE BELIEVED THAT THEY WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE GLORIOUS IDEALS OF ISLAM.

3. THE ACTUALIZATION OF THESE IDEALS IN THE PAST HAD BROUGHT PEACE, PROSPERITY AND DIGNITY TO MUCH OF THE MUSLIM WORLD. THE POWERFUL BURST OF CREATIVE ENERGY THAT ACCOMPANIED THE COMING OF ISLAM SPAWNED AN ILLUSTRIOUS ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION, ONE THAT LEFT AN INDELIBLE LEGACY FAR BEYOND ITS DOMAIN. ULTIMATELY IT RESCUED EUROPE FROM ITS DARK AGES.

4. HOWEVER, AS THE 20TH CENTURY CAME TO A CLOSE, WE REALIZED THAT TIME HAD PROGRESSED BUT IN MANY WAYS WE HAD NOT. THE REALITY THAT WAS EMERGING WAS NOT THE ONE TO WHICH WE HAD ASPIRED. RATHER, IT WAS UGLY AND UNACCEPTABLE. IN MANY WAYS, IT WAS NEITHER ROOTED IN NOR WAS IT CONSISTENT WITH THE ISLAMIC IDEALS. IN FACT, IT WAS IN SOME RESPECTS AN ANTITHESIS.

5. THE PROBLEMS THAT BEDEVIL THE MUSLIM WORLD HAVE BECOME WIDESPREAD TO THE POINT THAT OUR IMAGE IS TARNISHED BY UNFAIR STEREO TYPES. FOR EXAMPLE, ISLAM IS NOW EQUATED WITH VIOLENCE, POVERTY AND INDIGNITY. IN REALITY, THESE TROUBLES HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ISLAM. THESE ARE NOT PROBLEMS THAT ARE EXCLUSIVELY IN THE DOMAIN OF MUSLIMS. IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA FOR INSTANCE, SEVERAL NON-MUSLIM COUNTRIES FACE MANY PROBLEMS SIMILAR TO THOSE FACED THEIR MUSLIM MAJORITY NEIGHBOURS IN THE REGION. BUT SOME QUARTERS MISTAKENLY ASSOCIATE THE PROBLEMS AFFLICTING THE MUSLIM WORLD WITH ISLAM AND IT IS A CONFUSION THAT CONTINUES TO BE PERPETUATED.

6. NEVERTHELESS, WHAT CANNOT BE DENIED IS THAT IN MANY PARTS OF THE MUSLIM WORLD, WE ARE IN DEEP CRISIS. THE STARK REALITY IS THAT VIOLENT CONFLICT, ESPECIALLY DOMESTIC CONFLICT, ABOUNDS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD. THESE CONFLICTS HAVE EXTRACTED HUMAN, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COSTS THAT ARE IMMENSELY DAMAGING AND HAVE PREVENTED COUNTRIES FROM ACHIEVING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. ONE OF THE WORST HUMANITARIAN DISASTERS IS CURRENTLY UNFOLDING IN SUDAN. MUSLIM NATIONS HAVE FOUGHT EXHAUSTING WARS AGAINST EACH OTHER, DESTROYING MUCH OF THEIR ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AND IMPOVERISHING MANY OF THEIR PEOPLE. SUSPICION AND TENSION MARK RELATIONS BETWEEN SOME NEIGHBOURING ARAB AND AFRICAN MUSLIM STATES. MUSLIM MAJORITY PALESTINE HAS BEEN OCCUPIED. IT HAS BEEN DENIED POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND DIGNIFIED EXISTENCE FOR DECADES. AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ HAVE BECOME THE LATEST VICTIMS OF FOREIGN INVASION AND OCCUPATION.

7. MORE DAMAGING IS THE INCREASINGLY PROFESSED LINK BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND ISLAM. THE TERRIBLE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 HAVE PROVIDED A CONVENIENT EXCUSE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO PROMOTE THE THEORY OF A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS. TO THEM, IT IS CONVENIENT TO PAINT MATTERS IN THE STARKEST POSSIBLE TERMS BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE; GOOD AND EVIL; THE WEST AND ISLAM. TO THESE CYNICS, WE CAN OFFER A SIMPLE MATHEMATICAL PROPOSITION: THERE ARE AT MOST A FEW THOUSAND MEMBERS IN THE AL-QAEDA-LINKED TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS. IN COMPARISON, THERE ARE MORE THAN A BILLION MUSLIMS LIVING VERY ORDINARY AND VERY PEACEFUL LIVES. IT IS THEREFORE TRAGIC THAT THIS SPURIOUS ASSOCIATION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS WITH TERRORISM HAS GAINED INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY.

8. WE MUST ADMIT THAT THESE MANY OF THESE PROBLEMS ARISE DUE TO OUR WEAKNESSES. AND MUCH OF OUR WEAKNESS STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT OUR UNITY IS SO FRAGILE AND ALL TOO EASILY FRAGMENTED. ALL MUSLIMS READ THE QURAN. IT IS AND WILL ALWAYS BE A SOURCE OF DIVINE GUIDANCE AND INSPIRATION. THE TEACHINGS OF THE QURAN ARE DYNAMIC AND RELEVANT FOR ALL TIME. AS SUCH, IT SHOULD NOT BE BLAMED FOR OUR FAILINGS, BUT RATHER WE SHOULD REPROACH OURSELVES FOR NOT SUCCESSFULLY UNDERSTANDING ITS TEACHINGS AND ITS MESSAGES. IT IS MY VIEW THAT FOR NOW AND IN THE FUTURE, CONTEMPORARY IJTIHAD IS NEEDED AND SHOULD BE ACCORDED THE RECOGNITION IT DESERVES IF THE UMMAH IS TO PROGRESS.

9. IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT IN THE COURSE OF INTERPRETATION, WE WILL DIFFER. WHAT IS SAD AND ULTIMATELY DESTRUCTIVE FOR THE UMMAH, IS HOW WE SEEM TO RESORT TO VIOLENT CONFLICT TO RESOLVE OUR DIFFERENCES.

10. BUT VIOLENCE IS NOT OUR ONLY PROBLEM. THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF RESOURCES IN MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES. INDEED, SOME OF US ARE RICH AND AFFLUENT. YET POVERTY AND OTHER FORMS OF DEPRIVATION ARE ALSO AN EXTENSIVE AND UNFORTUNATE PART OF THE MUSLIM LANDSCAPE. AS SUCCESSIVE

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME REPORTS ATTEST, POVERTY IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN AT LEAST HALF THE COUNTRIES OF THE MUSLIM WORLD. IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, OF WHICH A SIZABLE PORTION IS MUSLIM, AS MUCH AS 90 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION OF SOME COUNTRIES SUBSIST ON LESS THAN US\$2 PER DAY IN PURCHASING POWER PARITY TERMS.

11. ISLAM EMPHASIZES THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE. YET A MAJORITY OF MUSLIM COUNTRIES ALSO HAS HIGH ADULT ILLITERACY RATES. EVEN MANY OF THOSE WHO ARE EDUCATED SUFFER FROM UNEMPLOYMENT AND INDIGNITY. MILLIONS OF MUSLIM CHILDREN AROUND THE GLOBE ARE MALNOURISHED. MOST OF THE REFUGEES IN THE WORLD TODAY ARE MUSLIMS.

12. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, MUCH MORE CAN BE DONE BY SOME MUSLIM COUNTRIES TO ALLOW PARTICIPATION BY THEIR PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF GOVERNANCE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT, WITHOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION, THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT KNOW THE PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS AND THEIR FULL POTENTIAL WILL ALSO REMAIN UNTAPPED. THE LIMITATION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES IS PARTICULARLY SEVERE IN THE CASE OF WOMEN IN MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES.

13. IT IS UNDER THESE POLITICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS, WHEN PEACEFUL AND DEMOCRATIC MEANS FOR REDRESS ARE LIMITED, THAT THE MUSLIM YOUTH ARE VULNERABLE TO SUCCUMB TO EXTREMIST IDEAS. ONCE THEY START NURTURING EXTREMIST IDEAS, THEY BECOME EASY RECRUITS FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN USURPING RELIGION FOR THEIR NARROW AND VIOLENT IDEALS. THOSE WHO RESORT TO TERRORISM OFTEN END UP HURTING NOT ONLY THE INNOCENT BUT ALSO THE VERY CAUSE THAT THEY TRY TO CHAMPION. VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM CREATE A NEGATIVE IMAGE OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS, WHICH CAN BE EXPLOITED BY ISLAM'S ENEMIES.

14. THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF ALL THESE PROBLEMS IS TO GIVE AN EXTREMELY NEGATIVE IMAGE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD. BECAUSE OF OUR LACK OF CAPACITY, MUSLIM NATIONS ARE OFTEN ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE GLOBAL ORDER. DESPITE OUR NUMBERS, WE HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE IN WORLD AFFAIRS. WE ARE ACCORDED LITTLE RESPECT IN THE COMMUNITY OF NATIONS.

15. THE CHALLENGE BEFORE THE MUSLIM WORLD TODAY IS TO CONFRONT THE UGLY REALITIES OF OUR PRESENT SITUATION AND RESTORE THE IMAGE OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAM. WE MUST STRIVE FOR A RENAISSANCE OF THE ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION. WE MUST RECOVER THE HALLMARKS OF THAT CIVILIZATION, NAMELY PEACE, PROSPERITY AND DIGNITY. AS ALWAYS, THE QUEST FOR INTERNATIONAL RESPECT AND DIGNITY MUST BEGIN AT HOME. WE MUST CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEACE CAN PREVAIL, ECONOMIES CAN PROSPER AND PEOPLE FIND THEIR DIGNITY.

16. OUR PROBLEMS ARE DEEP-ROOTED AND COMPLEX AND THE SOLUTIONS WILL NOT BE EASY TO FIND. EVERY COUNTRY IS UNIQUE. EACH HAS ITS OWN MIX OF PROBLEMS AS WELL AS STRENGTHS. THEREFORE, EACH OF US MUST FIND OUR OWN WAY. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE SOME FUNDAMENTAL AND COMMON PREREQUISITES THAT APPLY FOR ALL NATIONS.

17. OUR FIRST PREREQUISITE WILL HAVE TO BE PEACE AND STABILITY. WE CANNOT PROSPER OR LIVE IN DIGNITY WITHOUT PEACE. THE PEACE AND STABILITY WE SEEK CANNOT BE IMPOSED BY THE BARREL OF A GUN. AND PEACE THAT IS ATTAINED BY DENYING OUR CITIZENS A LEGITIMATE VOICE IS ILLUSORY AND WILL NOT LAST. SUCH A PEACE WILL EVENTUALLY BREED A VIOLENT REACTION.

18. THE PEACE WE SEEK MUST BE BUILT ON THE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE OF OUR PEOPLE. THIS WILL ONLY BE FORTHCOMING WHEN WE CHAMPION THEIR RIGHTS AND PROVIDE ROOM FOR THEM TO FULFILL THEIR LEGITIMATE ASPIRATIONS. WE CAN ONLY HAVE LASTING PEACE IF WE CARE FOR OUR RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES AS WELL AS WE CARE FOR OURSELVES. OUR PEACE MUST BE BUILT ON TOLERANCE AND JUSTICE FOR ALL.

19. FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD TO TRULY UPLIFT ITSELF, WE MUST CONCENTRATE ON CAPACITY BUILDING. THE UMMAH MUST BE EQUIPPED WITH THE TOOLS TO SUCCEED. WE SHOULD GRASP EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES AMONGST OURSELVES IN AREAS CONCERNING POVERTY ERADICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH. HOWEVER, MERE GROWTH IS INSUFFICIENT. WE MUST AIM FOR GROWTH THAT IS SOUND AND SUSTAINABLE; GROWTH THAT IS SHARED EFFICIENTLY AND DISTRIBUTED EQUITABLY. WE WANT BUREAUCRACIES THAT SERVE THE PEOPLE, NOT THEMSELVES. WE WANT DISCIPLINE, INTEGRITY AND EFFICIENCY AMONG OUR OFFICIALS. WE WANT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY. WE WANT TO RID SOCIETY OF CORRUPTION. ONLY IF WE HAVE GOOD GOVERNANCE CAN WE BEGIN TO PRODUCTIVELY EMPLOY OUR ASSETS AND GOD-GIVEN RICHES. THIS IS WHAT ISLAM DEMANDS.

20. THE ASSETS THAT SOME OF US ALREADY POSSESS MUST BE EFFICIENTLY DEVELOPED. IN THIS REGARD, NO ASSET IS MORE VALUABLE THAN OUR OWN PEOPLE. NO INVESTMENT IS MORE REWARDING, OR MORE PRODUCTIVE, THAN INVESTMENT IN OUR OWN PEOPLE. WE NEED TO ACCORD THE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR HUMAN CAPITAL. THIS IS AN AREA WHERE MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE WEAK. WE MUST ERADICATE ILLITERACY AND BUILD A QUALITY EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE, WITH EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE WHERE NECESSARY. THE PURSUIT OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IS A GOAL WE MUST ENTRENCH IN OUR YOUNG. WE MUST FOSTER CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION, FOR THIS IS WHERE NEW KNOWLEDGE LIES, AND THIS IS WHERE NEW SOURCES OF WEALTH CAN BE TAPPED. WE MUST SEEK SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT, FOR SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMPETITIVE EDGE DEPEND UPON IT.

21. IN MUCH OF THE MUSLIM WORLD, WE ARE GUILTY OF NEGLECTING ONE OF OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCES: THE WOMEN IN OUR SOCIETIES. WE HAVE FAILED TO PROVIDE THEM ADEQUATE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT. WE HAVE FAILED TO ACCORD THEM THE DIGNITY AND THE EQUAL RESPECT THAT THEY FULLY DESERVE. IN DOING SO, WE HAVE ONLY IMPOVERISHED OURSELVES, AND MARGINALIZED ONE FULL HALF OF MUSLIM HUMANITY. BUT FULLY DEVELOPED, THIS IS ALSO AN AREA WHERE WE HAVE GREAT RESERVOIRS OF UNTAPPED POTENTIAL WEALTH.

22. THE MUSLIM WORLD'S STRUGGLE BEGINS WITH PUTTING OUR OWN HOUSES IN ORDER. BUT THIS IS MERELY THE BEGINNING. TO BE ACCORDED A DIGNIFIED PLACE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WE MUST ACQUIT OURSELVES AS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS OF THAT COMMUNITY. WAR MUST CEASE TO BE AN OPTION AMONG MUSLIM NATIONS, AND BETWEEN MUSLIM NATIONS AND OTHERS. SO MUST TERRORISM.

23. ONE OF THE GREATEST CONSTRAINTS UPON MUSLIM EMPOWERMENT IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS IS THE FACT THAT WE ARE OFTEN DIVIDED AMONG OURSELVES. WE MUST CLOSE RANKS. WE SHOULD SEEK TO DILUTE THE MISTRUST, ANIMOSITY AND RIVALRY THAT SOMETIMES UNDERMINE OUR COHESION. WE SHOULD STRIVE TO PRESENT A STRONG AND UNITED FRONT ON THE ISSUES THAT ARE DEAR AND VITAL TO THE MUSLIM WORLD. WE MUST REDUCE OUR DEPENDENCY UPON OUTSIDE POWERS, AND RESIST COMPROMISING OUR COLLECTIVE INTERESTS IN FAVOUR OF THEIRS.

24. THE FUTURE OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAM HOWEVER, ULTIMATELY LIES IN WORKING WITH OTHERS FOR MUTUAL ENRICHMENT, AND NOT IN CONFLICT WITH THEM. WE CANNOT ADVANCE BY BUILDING WALLS AND RETREATING INTO OUR SHELLS. WE MUST ACTIVELY SEEK OUT AND ENGAGE THE OTHER, FOR THERE IS MUCH THAT WE CAN LEARN AND BENEFIT FROM THEM. EARLY ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION WAS OPEN AND OUTWARD LOOKING. FOR INSTANCE, IT DID NOT HESITATE TO ABSORB SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE FROM THE GREEKS AND THE ROMANS. IN THIS PROCESS, ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS KNOWLEDGE BASE AND PASSED IT ON TO THE WESTERN WORLD.

25. THERE IS EVEN GREATER URGENCY NOW FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD TO LEARN FROM THE REST, FOR WE HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND BY CENTURIES OF COLONIALISM AND BY OUR OWN NEGLECT AND POOR GOVERNANCE. WE MUST STRENGTHEN THE BRIDGES OF COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING WITH THE WEST AND WITH OTHERS. WE MUST BUILD TRUST AND CONFIDENCE. THERE IS MUCH THAT ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION SHARES WITH THE OTHERS. LET US CELEBRATE THE SIMILARITIES, AND RESPECT THE DIFFERENCES.

26. MUSLIM NATIONS DESERVE TO BE ACCORDED RESPECTABILITY BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. THE POOREST COUNTRIES WITH SCARCE NATURAL RESOURCES AND HUMAN CAPITAL WILL FACE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES.

NATIONAL ACTION ALONE WILL BE INADEQUATE. THEY WILL REQUIRE ROBUST AND SUSTAINED EXTERNAL SUPPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING FROM FRIENDS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

27. THE MORE FORTUNATE AMONG US THAT ARE POLITICALLY STABLE AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE MUST NEVERTHELESS TEND TO OUR DEFICITS, BE THEY POLITICAL, ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL. WE NEED IN PARTICULAR TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE IN EVERY SPHERE.

28. CIVILIZATIONAL CHANGE AND RENAISSANCE IS A COMPLEX AND COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS. IT REQUIRES THE PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF ALL. THE POLITICAL LEADERS SCHOLARS AND PROFESSIONALS, THE ENTREPRENEURS AND THE WORKERS, THE PARENTS AND THE TEACHERS AND THE YOUTH – ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY. THEY MUST ALL FULFILL THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES. BEYOND BORDERS, NATIONS AND PEOPLES NEED TO WORK WITH ONE ANOTHER IN SOLIDARITY AND COMMON PURPOSE. THIS WAS HOW ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION SCALED THE HEIGHTS MANY CENTURIES AGO. THIS IS HOW THE MUSLIM WORLD CAN RECOVER ITS DIGNITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.

THANK YOU.

*This speech does not include off-the-cuff remarks made by the Prime Minister at the function