

**OPENING ADDRESS BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS CONFERENCE 2004  
AT PUTRAJAYA CONVENTION CENTRE  
5 JULY 2004**

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*"PLACE MAKING AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT"*

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD AFTERNOON

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DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. LET ME BEGIN BY THANKING THE ORGANISERS FOR GIVING ME THE HONOUR OF DELIVERING THE OPENING ADDRESS TO THIS COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS' CONFERENCE. IT IS A PLEASURE TO SPEAK TO SUCH AN INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF PROFESSIONALS THAT MAKE UP A VITAL COMPONENT OF ANY COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT.

2. FOR PLANNERS AND POLICYMAKERS ALIKE, TACKLING THE ISSUES OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT. ALMOST HALF THE POPULATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ALREADY LIVE IN URBAN AREAS. IF TODAY'S DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ARE A RELIABLE INDICATOR, WE CAN EXPECT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO FOLLOW A SIMILAR PATTERN AND HAVE 70 TO 80 PERCENT OF THEIR POPULATION RESIDE IN CITIES BY THE YEAR 2020.

3. OF COURSE, MUCH OF THIS WOULD ALSO DEPEND ON OUR SUCCESS IN RURAL REJUVENATION TO GO HAND IN HAND WITH URBAN DEVELOPMENT. BUT BY AND LARGE, WE CAN ANTICIPATE AN INCREASE IN THE SIZE OF OUR CITIES' POPULATIONS. AND WITH THIS SWELLING IN SIZE COMES THE ATTENDANT PROBLEMS OF URBAN POVERTY, SOCIETAL FRAGMENTATION, INADEQUATE HOUSING AND POLLUTION.

4. THUS, AS WE VENTURE TO MAKE OUR CITIES DYNAMIC AND VIBRANT COMMERCIAL CENTRES, WE MUST ALSO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT IS SUSTAINABLE. THE GROWTH OF OUR CITIES WILL PROVE TO BE VOLATILE AND SHORT-LIVED IF WE NEGLECT THE CITIES' POOREST INHABITANTS OR IF WE IGNORE THE CITIES' ENVIRONMENTAL BALANCE, WITH ONLY THE PURSUIT PURE COMMERCIAL GAINS AS OUR FOCUS. INSTEAD OF STABLE AND PEACEFUL GROWTH, WE WILL BE CONFRONTED WITH RISING DISCONTENT, CRIME AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

5. TODAY'S PLANNERS ARE IN A UNIQUE AND EXCITING POSITION TO ADDRESS SOME OF THESE DIFFICULT ISSUES. PLANNING HAS BECOME MUCH MORE HOLISTIC AND WELL-ROUNDED. IT HAS MOVED FROM A MAINLY PHYSICAL APPROACH TO ONE THAT IS MORE PEOPLE-CENTRED, PLACING EQUAL IMPORTANCE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES. PLANNING HAS ALSO BECOME MORE PARTICIPATORY. FROM A TOP-DOWN APPROACH, PLANNING HAS BECOME MORE CONSULTATIVE, ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS ON DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THE WAY THEY WORK AND LIVE.

6. BECAUSE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS, I HOPE THAT THIS CONFERENCE WILL BRING TO THE FORE BEST PRACTICES ON URBAN POVERTY REDUCTION, PROVISION OF QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, AMONG OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES. I ALSO HOPE THAT THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE WILL SERVE AS CONSTRUCTIVE INPUT FOR THE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES HERE AND SIMILARLY, WE HOPE TO LEARN FROM THE FINDINGS AND SUCCESSES OF OTHER NATIONS.

7. TACKLING URBAN POVERTY IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER IS CRUCIAL IN ORDER FOR MALAYSIA TO ATTAIN OUR VISION OF BECOMING A DEVELOPED COUNTRY BY THE YEAR 2020. OUR ASPIRATION IS TO HAVE A MORE EQUITABLE, PROGRESSIVE AND UNITED SOCIETY, WHICH THRIVES ON OUR OWN CULTURAL IDENTITY.

8. SEVERAL STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO REALISE THIS ASPIRATION, AND WE HOPE TO SEE THE BENEFITS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. FOR INSTANCE, THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PLAN, IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR URBAN POVERTY AS WELL AS AFFORDABLE HOUSING HAS BEEN STREAMLINED UNDER ONE ENTITY, NAMELY THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT. OUR LEGISLATION HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO ENABLE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PREPARATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS, AS WELL AS TO ALLOW PUBLIC APPEALS. LEGISLATION CHANGES HAVE ALSO BEEN MADE TO ENABLE BETTER PROTECTION OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES.

9. OF COURSE, WE STILL FACE MANY CHALLENGES AND THERE ALWAYS REMAINS MORE TO BE DONE. PLANNING IS A COMPLEX ENDEAVOUR, AS THERE ARE MANY CONFLICTING STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS TO CONSIDER. NEVERTHELESS, I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NOW A GREATER AGREEMENT AND WILLINGNESS, FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS, TO WORK TOWARDS COMMON GOALS AND BENEFITS. IN THIS, IT MUST ALSO BE THE ROLE OF THE PLANNER TO PROVIDE GOOD MECHANISMS THROUGH WHICH GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY MAY WORK TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN THEIR CITIES.

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10. I AM SURE THAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED BETWEEN US A TREASURE TROVE OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T WHEN A PLAN IS IMPLEMENTED. WE HAVE TO BE FOCUSED AND PRAGMATIC IN OUR EFFORTS, AND CONCENTRATE ON ACHIEVING RESULTS. BE IT POVERTY REDUCTION, BETTER HOUSING OR BETTER HEALTHCARE, I HOPE THAT WE ARE ALL GUIDED BY A CLEAR SENSE OF WHAT NEEDS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED, AND THAT THIS IS REFLECTED IN OUR PLANS AND IN OUR ACTIONS. IN THIS WAY, WE WILL BE ONE STEP CLOSER TO IMPROVING THE LIVES OF MILLIONS CURRENTLY LIVING IN POVERTY AND NEED.

11. INDEED, PLANNERS TODAY SHOULDER A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WELL-BEING OF SO MANY PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH IT IS REPEATEDLY SAID THAT "IF YOU FAIL TO PLAN, YOU PLAN TO FAIL", I MUST ADD THAT YOU MUST NOT ONLY PLAN, BUT YOU MUST PLAN WELL. OFTEN, THE SLIGHTEST CHANGE OF DETAIL IN A PLAN WILL EITHER EASE THE BURDEN OF LIFE FOR MOST CITIZENS, OR IT WILL MAKE LIFE THAT MUCH HARDER FOR PEOPLE. I URGE YOU TO ALWAYS BEAR IN MIND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PEOPLE, AND DISCHARGE YOUR DUTIES TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY AND WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS.

12. TO ALL DELEGATES AT THIS CONFERENCE, I HOPE THAT THESE THREE DAYS WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO UNCOVER NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND DOING. TO OUR GUESTS FROM OVERSEAS, I WISH YOU A WARM WELCOME AND A MEMORABLE STAY IN OUR BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. I WISH THIS CONFERENCE GREAT SUCCESS, AND HOPE THAT IT WILL BE FRUITFUL FOR ALL DELEGATES.

13. ON THAT NOTE, IT IS MY PLEASURE AND PRIVILEGE TO DECLARE OPEN THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS CONFERENCE 2004.

THANK YOU.