

**SPEECH BY  
DATO SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI,  
AT THE NST – PWC YOUNG HUMANITARIAN AWARDS DINNER,  
AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL  
12 AUGUST 2004**

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Yang Mulia Raja Datuk Arshad Tun Uda  
Executive Chairman, PricewaterhouseCoopers Malaysia

Dato' Kalimullah Hassan  
Group Editor-in-chief, NSTP Group

Distinguished Judges

Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking Pricewaterhouse Coopers and the New Straits Times Press Group for inviting me to say a few words at this dinner tonight. It is an honour and a pleasure to present the inaugural NST-PWC Young Humanitarian Award. I believe that creating an event that recognises the humanitarian spirit in young Malaysians is an endeavour that is noble and in this regard, I would like to congratulate the organisers for devoting their energies to do so.

2. Attending an event that celebrates the contributions of the young frequently invites me to cast my mind back to when I was a young man, many years ago. The level of progress that Malaysia has achieved is the most obvious difference between then and now. On my way here this evening, I gazed at the towering buildings that seemed to reach out to the sky and I was infused with a sense of pride at how far we have come. By and large, Malaysians live in comfort and modernity and we surround ourselves with the fruits of our success. Everyday, we are reminded by the wonderful symbols of our achievements, our prosperity and our relative wealth.

3. Notwithstanding the ready availability of our modern comforts and conveniences, I still retain many fond memories of my early years. At that time, Malaysia was still a fledgling nation, tentatively finding its way in the world. We may not have had as many of life's luxuries compared to present-day Malaysia, but the milk of human kindness was certainly abundant. I admit that many of my recollections may be drawn by time and sentimentality, but the pace of life seemed to be more leisurely and forgiving. More importantly, people seemed to have more time for one another. Communities seemed to come together to help and assist one another.

4. I say this not because I believe we should discount all our accomplishments of the past five decades. I say this because I feel that it would be a shame if we discard our humanity in our headlong chase for progress and material gain. In fact, I strongly believe that worldly success and consideration for others are not, and should ever be mutually exclusive. As a nation, our vision is not only to become a developed country

by the year 2020, but to aspire to have a society that is equitable, progressive and united. There is still some distance left in our journey, and as we travel this road, we should be mindful that each of us bears the responsibility to make ours a caring society. We have a responsibility to ourselves, as well as to our children to inculcate the fundamental principle of compassion and respect, particularly to those who are less fortunate than us.

Ladies and Gentlemen

5. I find it heart-warming to see that in general, Malaysians have not forgotten those who are less fortunate and in need. Society cannot be perfect but society can certainly care for those who are less fortunate. We can try, in our own humble way to make their lives better.

6. There are many outstanding individuals and organisations who are working to make the world a better place for all. Providing aid and social benefits is no longer just the purview of the state or the social structure. There are growing numbers of NGOs who do very excellent work at the different layers of society. I am happy that numerous corporations are also contributing under the banner of social responsibility, to support the various communities within which they work by committing their resources. Individuals too are setting up trust funds or supporting their favourite charity regularly, or helping those less unfortunate than themselves through donations in cash and kind. I would also like to see people donating their time and energy. The spirit of volunteerism, if nurtured and marshalled properly can be a powerful force of good in society.

7. Whether it is tending to the terminally ill, or risking one's own life and limb to pull a child out of a burning building, or giving one's life to assist a stranger under assault, the root of humanitarianism is the capacity to care for a fellow human being. The values that define this capacity – the spirit of caring, of selflessness, of kindness and of charity, are the values that I would like to see cultivated in our young today. We must not forget to uphold and develop these core values that make us humans and uniquely Malaysian.

8. It is interesting to note that the first Nobel Peace Prize awarded in 1901, more than a hundred years ago, was for humanitarian work. The first peace prize went to Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross. At the time, the award came in for criticism – people questioned that humanitarian work was not relevant to peace. However, under Alfred Nobel's will, one of the criteria for the Peace prize was 'fraternity between nations'. What better way to promote this ideal that to hold out a helping hand to a sufferer, regardless of identity or party.

9. We Malaysians are very lucky to be living in peace in a multi-cultural, multi-racial society. I believe that truly humanitarian acts should transcend all racial and societal barriers. It is not about the colour of your skin or your creed, but about the commitment to improve or enrich the lives of others and the welfare of humanity and society as a whole. From this award, it is uplifting to see Malaysians from all walks of

life, different religions and social strata, coming out to truly help those in need – often going the extra mile to make a difference. Let's be inspired by these acts of charity and goodness. Each and every one of us can make an effort to improve situations in our neighbourhoods, our society and our country.

10. Tonight, we are here to celebrate the spirit of selflessness among fellow Malaysians. In some ways, there is an irony to these awards because they are drawing attention to people who have contributed without regard for reward or recognition. However, it is important to highlight their services to the community, because they are indeed beacons for the rest of us. By paying tribute to these individuals and groups of individuals, I hope we can help improve the consciousness of society to the plight of those less fortunate than ourselves or in need of our services. Cynics regard the saying "One person can make a difference" as a trite and throwaway cliché, but there is a gentle and insistent truth to these words. I have long believed that the strength of a nation lies in the fortitude of its people. Each of us has a role to play, each of us has something to give. Together, collectively, we can make a difference.

Thank you.

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