

**SPEECH BY  
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI  
AT THE MINISTERIAL SESSION, KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION  
COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (KI.C.T.4D) 2005  
CONFERENCE AT PICC, PITRAJAYA  
23 JUN 2005**

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BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD AFTERNOON

HONOURABLE MINISTERS

VICE-CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD AND  
ACTING MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DR. AHMAD MOHAMED ALI  
PRESIDENT OF I.D.B.

EXCELLENCIES

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN

1. IT IS AN HONOUR AND A PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO ADDRESS THIS MINISTERIAL SESSION ON "KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2005". I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS CONFERENCE PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO DISCUSS AND DELIBERATE ON THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO THE CREATION AND SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE, AS WELL AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGIES – PARTICULARLY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (I.C.T.) – AND THEIR IMPACT ON I.D.B. MEMBER COUNTRIES.

2. I AM PLEASED TO NOTE THAT THE THEME FOR THIS CONFERENCE IS "HARNESSING KNOWLEDGE AND I.C.T. FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE I.D.B. MEMBER COUNTRIES". IN THIS THEME, I SEE BOTH CHALLENGE AND PROMISE. IN THIS THEME, I SEE THAT OUR MISSION IS CERTAIN AND OUR COMMITMENT TOWARDS WORKING TOGETHER MUST BE CLEAR. INDEED, I HOPE THE DELIBERATIONS IN THIS CONFERENCE WILL HELP PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL BASIS AND THE POLITICAL WILL TO TURN OUR COLLECTIVE VISION OF A STRONG, UNITED AND PROGRESSIVE UMMAH INTO REALITY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

3. AS WE ARE ALL UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE, THE WORLD ECONOMY IS UNDERGOING A REVOLUTIONARY STRUCTURAL CHANGE. THE TRADITIONAL DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND WEALTH CREATION – LAND, LABOUR OR CAPITAL – HAVE LOST SOME OF THEIR DOMINANCE. MORE RECENTLY, KNOWLEDGE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, HAVE REPLACED THEM AS THE NEW, KEY DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND WEALTH CREATION. TODAY, TO BE DEVELOPED MEANS HAVING THE CAPACITY TO HARNESS AND APPLY EXISTING KNOWLEDGE; TO CREATE AND INNOVATE NEW KNOWLEDGE; AND TO UTILISE COST-SAVING TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS I.C.T. AND OTHER TOOLS TO ENABLE KNOWLEDGE CREATION, UTILISATION AND SHARING.

4. HOWEVER, THIS SHIFT IN THE DRIVERS OF GROWTH AND WEALTH CREATION – FROM COMMODITIES TO KNOWLEDGE, FROM THE TANGIBLE TO THE INTANGIBLE – HAS PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF ALL COUNTRIES, BUT MORE SO FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE MAJORITY OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY THE LEAST DEVELOPED ONES, STILL HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH BASIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES SUCH AS WIDESPREAD POVERTY, MALNUTRITION AND OTHER HEALTH RISKS, POOR ACCESS TO EDUCATION, POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND IN SOME CASES, EVEN PHYSICAL SECURITY. IN THE PAST, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HAD THE LUXURY OF ADDRESSING BASIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES BEFORE MOVING ON TO THE MORE ADVANCED ISSUES. NOWADAYS, DEVELOPING COUNTRIES NEED TO THINK ABOUT SOLVING POVERTY AND ILLITERACY AT THE SAME TIME AS STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND ATTRACTING INVESTMENTS.

5. ISLAMIC DEVELOPING NATIONS ARE NO DIFFERENT AND CONTINUE TO FACE THESE TWIN DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES, SOME MORE ACUTELY THAN OTHERS. THE WORRYING POVERTY EXPERIENCED IN MOST MUSLIM COUNTRIES IS EXACERBATED BY THE HIGH LEVELS OF INEQUALITY EXPERIENCED BETWEEN, AND WITHIN, MUSLIM COUNTRIES. MEANWHILE, ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS IS SEVERELY HAMPERED BY THE LACK OF HARD AND SOFT INFRASTRUCTURE, AS WELL AS ACUTE SHORTAGE OF HUMAN CAPITAL.

6. SADLY, THE POTENTIAL FOR ACCELERATING DEVELOPMENT IN MOST MUSLIM COUNTRIES IS BEING HELD BACK BY THE LOW PRIORITY ACCORDED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND CAPACITIES. CERTAIN MUSLIM COUNTRIES SPEND MORE OF THEIR BUDGET ON MILITARY EXPENDITURE, COMPARED TO THAT ON EDUCATION. IN INSTANCES WHERE EXPENDITURE FOR EDUCATION IS LARGER THAN EXPENDITURE FOR THE MILITARY, THE DIFFERENCE IS USUALLY NOT SUBSTANTIAL. MEANWHILE, THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS WITHIN MUSLIM COUNTRIES OFTEN TIMES DO NOT RECEIVE THE ATTENTION THEY REQUIRE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2003 CHARACTERISED THE VARIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE ARAB WORLD AS CONSISTING OF OUTDATED CURRICULA, UNQUALIFIED TEACHERS, SUB-STANDARD FACILITIES AS WELL AS INEFFICIENT INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES REMAINS AN ISSUE, PARTICULARLY FOR THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN IN CERTAIN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES. IT

IS MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT WOMEN MAKE UP HALF OF THE POPULATION OF THE EARTH AND AS LONG AS THEIR ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY IS CURTAILED, ECONOMIES CAN ONLY FUNCTION AT HALF THEIR POTENTIAL.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

7. 800 YEARS AGO, BAGHDAD, THE CAPITAL OF THE ISLAMIC EMPIRE, WAS THE FOCAL POINT OF THE WORLD'S INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY, ENGENDERING NUMEROUS DISCOVERIES IN SCIENCE AND MEDICINE AS WELL AS THE GREATEST ADVANCEMENTS IN ART AND PHILOSOPHY. BAGHDAD BECAME THE CROSS-FERTILISER OF MINDS, OF IDEAS AND OF INNOVATIONS. THE MUSLIM WORLD LIT UP THE DARKNESS OF APATHY AND IGNORANCE PREVALENT IN MUCH OF THE WORLD THEN. 800 YEARS LATER, THE WHEELS OF HISTORY HAVE TURNED YET AGAIN, THIS TIME TO OUR DETRIMENT. DESPITE OUR GLORIOUS HISTORY AND PAST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AREA OF THE SCIENCES, THE MUSLIM WORLD NOW LAGS BEHIND MOST OF THE DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING WORLD IN TERMS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURE.

8. WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, THE MAJORITY OF MUSLIM COUNTRIES CONTINUE TO BE TECHNOLOGICALLY BACKWARD AND INVEST LITTLE, IF AT ALL, IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. COMPARED TO THE WESTERN COUNTRIES' RATIO OF 3,000 SCIENTISTS PER MILLION POPULATION, O.I.C. COUNTRIES CAN COUNT LESS THAN 50 SCIENTISTS PER MILLION POPULATION. MORE THAN 80 PER CENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS, A GOOD INDICATOR OF KNOWLEDGE CREATION, ARE ATTRIBUTED TO WESTERN NATIONS, WHICH IN TURN, SPEND MORE THAN 2 PER CENT OF THE GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (G.D.P.) ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. EVEN MALAYSIA, WHICH HAS BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED AS ONE OF THE MORE ADVANCED MUSLIM NATIONS, ONLY SPENDS A LITTLE OVER HALF A PERCENT OF ITS TOTAL G.D.P. ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

9. GIVEN THE DIRE SITUATION THAT MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE FACED WITH, I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT IT IS HIGH TIME FOR US AS TO RETHINK OUR ATTITUDES, REASSESS OUR PRIORITIES, AND RE-STRATEGISE OUR DEVELOPMENT POLICIES. AS YOU MAY BE AWARE, "VISION 1440 HIJRAH" COMMITS O.I.C. MEMBER-COUNTRIES TOWARDS BECOMING A COMMUNITY THAT ADVANCES KNOWLEDGE IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE THE WELL-BEING AND RESPECT OF THE UMMAH. THIS ECHOES THE INJUNCTION THAT ALLAH S.W.T. PLACED ON MANKIND IN SURAH 96 OF THE QURAN. IN THIS SURAH, IT IS RECOUNTED HOW ALLAH S.W.T. INSTRUCTED OUR BELOVED PROPHET (PEACE BE UPON HIM) TO "PROCLAIM! (OR READ!)", AS THE FIRST STEP IN ACQUIRING HIGHER KNOWLEDGE. THEREFORE, BEING FOLLOWERS OF THE FAITH, IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US TO LEARN AND TO CONSTANTLY IMPROVE OUR SITUATION, AS INDIVIDUALS, AS A NATION, AND AS MEMBERS OF THE UMMAH.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

10. AS ONE OF THE DRIVERS OF GROWTH, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (I.C.T.) PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND SHARING. I.C.T. PROVIDES NEW AND FASTER WAYS OF DELIVERING AND ACCESSING INFORMATION, FACILITATING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION, DEVELOPING NEW WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS, AND CREATING NEW LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES. THEREFORE, I.C.T. CAN PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ENABLING MUSLIM COUNTRIES TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES THEY FACE.

11. IN MY SPEECH THIS MORNING, I TOUCHED UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF FOSTERING GREATER COLLABORATION BETWEEN O.I.C. COUNTRIES THROUGH TRADE AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS LEVERAGING ON THE STRENGTHS OF EACH COUNTRY AS A WAY TO UPLIFT THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF ISLAMIC ECONOMIES. IN THIS REGARD, I BELIEVE THAT I.C.T. CAN BE USED TO FACILITATE BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS, FOR EXAMPLE VIA E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS. CRITICAL INFORMATION FOR INVESTMENT PURPOSES CAN ALSO BE RELAYED MORE EFFICIENTLY THROUGH I.C.T., THUS REDUCING THE RISKS AND COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH INVESTING.

12. I HAVE ALSO ALWAYS EMPHASISED THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND MARGINALISED SOCIAL GROUPS WITHIN COUNTRIES ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ECONOMY AND TO DERIVE BENEFITS FROM DOING SO. HERE TOO, I.C.T. CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE. TO USE MALAYSIA AS AN EXAMPLE, WE HAVE DELIBERATELY PURSUED A STRATEGY OF "I.C.T. FOR ALL" TO ENSURE THAT I.C.T. WOULD BE USED BY ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY, NOT JUST BY A SMALL GROUP OF ELITES. WE ARE CONTINUING TO ROLL-OUT I.C.T. INFRASTRUCTURE TO ENHANCE ITS AVAILABILITY AND COVERAGE TO ALL POPULATED AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. IDENTIFIED COMMUNITIES, SUCH AS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES, HEALTH CENTRES, AND COMMUNITY CENTRES, WILL ALL BE CONNECTED IN A PHASED MANNER. THE SETTING UP OF COMMUNITY TELECENTRES ARE ALSO IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE WHICH EXIST, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN THE URBAN AND RURAL POPULATIONS.

13. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CONTENT IN THE AREAS OF EDUCATION, ENTERTAINMENT, TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORTS IS ALSO AN AREA WHICH MALAYSIA PLACES GREAT EMPHASIS ON. THE LACK OF LOCAL INTERNET CONTENT IS SEEN AS ONE OF THE FACTORS LEADING TO A DIGITAL DIVIDE, AS 70 PER CENT OF OUR POPULATION IS ONLY COMFORTABLE READING IN BAHASA MELAYU, OUR NATIONAL LANGUAGE, WHEREAS 90 PER CENT OF THE CONTENT ON THE INTERNET IS IN ENGLISH. I BELIEVE THIS PREDICAMENT IS SHARED BY MOST OF THE OTHER I.D.B. MEMBER COUNTRIES.

14. ABOVE ALL, THE PROVISION OF I.C.T. INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY ADEQUATE AMOUNTS OF TRAINING SO THAT THE I.C.T. CAN BE MEANINGFULLY USED TO CREATE REAL VALUE. THIS INCLUDES CONTINUOUS

SKILLS UPGRADING, IDENTIFYING OF TRAINING NEEDS AND CAPACITY, AND MOBILISING SUCH CAPACITY TO FULFILL THESE NEEDS. WITH THE ADVENT OF I.C.T., FULFILLING EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS HAS BECOME MUCH EASIER. E-LEARNING AND INTERNET SEARCH ENGINES HAS LITERALLY TRANSFORMED THE WAY WE LEARN, MAKING IT EASIER AND CHEAPER TO OBTAIN AND SHARE INFORMATION, THAN EVER BEFORE. THIS REPRESENTS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE IN MUSLIM NATIONS TO ENHANCE THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION. TO WOMEN IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES WHO ARE DISCOURAGED FROM PURSUING A FORMAL EDUCATION, I.C.T. MAY PERHAPS BE A LIFELINE TO INFORMATION AND RESOURCES THAT THEY WOULD OTHERWISE NOT HAVE ACCESS TO. THIS WILL ALLOW THEM TO PLAY A MORE MEANINGFUL ROLE AS WIVES, MOTHERS AND MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.

15. CLEARLY, THERE IS MUCH SCOPE AND OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE, ENHANCE TRADE AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND BUILD HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY ACROSS THE MUSLIM WORLD, INCLUDING THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF I.C.T.. THEREFORE, THE DEVELOPMENT OF I.C.T. IS SOMETHING THAT I.D.B. MEMBER-COUNTRIES SHOULD PURSUE, QUICKLY AND WITH STRONG RESOLVE. NEVERTHELESS, GIVING RECOGNITION ALONE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE, HUMAN CAPITAL AND I.C.T. DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ENOUGH. THE ACTUAL FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RELATED PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEMBER COUNTRIES. TO TAKE THE SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION ONE STEP FURTHER, I BELIEVE THAT WEALTHIER AND MORE ADVANCED MUSLIM NATIONS SHOULD PLAY THEIR ROLE TO ASSIST THE LESS ADVANCED MUSLIM NATIONS BY PROVIDING FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THESE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES.

16. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE I.D.B. MEMBER COUNTRIES TO START IDENTIFYING PARTICULAR PROJECTS THAT COULD BE IMPLEMENTED TO ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE AND I.C.T. DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THEIR COUNTRIES. MEMBER COUNTRIES SHOULD ALSO BEGIN TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS THAT THEY CAN WORK WITH TO FURTHER DEVELOP THESE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES.

17. IN PARTICULAR, I THINK THERE IS MUCH SCOPE FOR THE I.D.B. AND THE O.I.C. TO PLAY A DIRECT ROLE IN ENHANCING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UMMAH, FOR EXAMPLE THROUGH THE PROVISION OF SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDY NOT ONLY THE TRADITIONS, BUT ALSO MODERN DISCIPLINES. THE I.D.B. AND THE O.I.C. CAN ALSO PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN PERSUADING AND INCENTIVIZING MUSLIM COUNTRIES TO INVEST MORE IN EDUCATION, IN I.C.T. AND IN R&D. IN THE FIELD OF BUSINESS, THE I.D.B. AND THE O.I.C. CAN PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN DEVELOPING MICRO-ENTERPRISES AND SMALL AND MEDIUM-SCALE ENTERPRISES (S.M.E.'S), BY PROVIDING LOANS AND FUNDING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES, AS WELL AS COUNSELLING AND ADVICE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

18. I AM MORE THAN AWARE THAT MANAGING A DEVELOPING NATION CAN BE QUITE COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING, WITH MANY COMPETING IMPERATIVES TO CONSIDER. HOWEVER, AS I HAVE REITERATED MANY TIMES BEFORE, CRITICAL PRIORITIES FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD MUST RELATE TO MATTERS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE, POVERTY ERADICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THESE ISSUES MUST BE ADDRESSED QUICKLY, WITH WISDOM AND WITH CONVICTION. BUT WITHIN THESE KEY AREAS, IT IS CRITICAL THAT THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT BE GIVEN THE HIGHEST PRIORITY. IN THAT SENSE, MUSLIM NATIONS SHOULD UPGRADE THEIR FOCUS ON TRAINING AND EDUCATION, AND WHERE POSSIBLE, COLLABORATE AND LEVERAGE ON EACH OTHER TO BUILD CAPACITY, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS. INDEED, WITH A MORE UNITED AND COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE ATTAINMENT AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPACITY BUILDING, WE MAY YET SEE A RESURGENCE AND A REGENERATION OF AN ISLAMIC BODY OF KNOWLEDGE. THIS WILL HELP US TO CREATE A STRONG ECONOMIC BASE ON WHICH WE CAN COMPETE AND FLOURISH, IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION AGE.

19. INDEED, BY THE YEAR 1440 HIJRAH, I HOPE TO SEE THE KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES OF I.D.B. MEMBER COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTING SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES AND TO THE UMMAH AS A WHOLE. THIS IS A CHALLENGE FOR ALL MEMBER COUNTRIES AND TO THE I.D.B.. TOGETHER, LET US SET OUR VISION AND TOGETHER MOVE FORWARD TOWARDS ACHIEVING THAT VISION. BY COUPLING OUR ACTIONS WITH OUR PRAYERS, INSYA-ALLAH, WE WILL SUCCEED.

THANK YOU.