

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE KUALA LUMPUR O.I.C. HEALTH
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2007
AT HOTEL SUNWAY LAGOON RESORT & SPA, SELANGOR
14 JUNE 2007**

"HEALTH: THE IMPETUS TOWARDS ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY"

BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH AND GOOD MORNING

YB DATUK SERI DR. CHUA SOI LEK
MINISTER OF HEALTH, MALAYSIA

HIS EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR DR. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE O.I.C.

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. AHMED SALEH HARIRI
DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE
ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. ALHAMDULILLAH, ALL PRAISE BE TO ALLAH, BY WHOSE GRACE AND BLESSINGS WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY. THIS CONFERENCE PRESENTS US WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS AND ADDRESS ONE OF THE KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE UMMAH IN THE 21ST CENTURY, NAMELY THE WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF MUSLIMS.

2. WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY AT AN HISTORIC MOMENT. THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH, HELD TODAY IN KUALA LUMPUR, IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND.

3. BACK IN 2005, KUALA LUMPUR HOSTED THE SECOND ANNUAL MEETING FOR SELF RELIANCE IN VACCINE PRODUCTION AMONG O.I.C. MEMBER COUNTRIES. THEN AROSE THE REALISATION THAT A PROPER TRACK IS REQUIRED TO DISCUSS THE LARGE ARRAY OF HEALTH CONCERNS AFFECTING THE UMMAH. I AM PLEASED TO SAY THAT WE HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE NOW, AS MALAYSIA WELCOMES YOU TO THIS INAUGURAL O.I.C. HEALTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

4. ALTHOUGH UNFORTUNATE, WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT MUSLIM COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND ON SO MANY FRONTS. THIS IS A REALITY THAT WE ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO CORRECT, EVEN AS WE SPEAK. BUT IN THE REALM OF PUBLIC HEALTH, THAT WORK BECOMES MORE URGENT, AND CRITICALLY MORE IMPORTANT.

5. IT IS AN UNDER-APPRECIATED FACT THAT INFANTS AND CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN ISLAMIC NATIONS FACE THE HIGHEST RISK OF CATCHING INFECTIOUS DISEASES. ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION REPORT (2004), SEVEN OF THE 10 NATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST INFANT MORTALITY RATES ARE MEMBERS OF THE O.I.C.

6. SOME ARE MORE ADVERSELY AFFECTED THAN OTHERS. SOME OF OUR MEMBERS IN AFRICA AND CENTRAL ASIA SUFFER INFANT MORTALITY RATES EXCEEDING 100 PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS. INDEED, VERY FEW ISLAMIC COUNTRIES REGISTER INFANT MORTALITY RATES LOWER THAN 10 PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS. THESE ARE COUNTRIES SUCH AS BRUNEI, BAHRAIN, AND MALAYSIA.

7. O.I.C. MEMBER NATIONS ALSO SUFFER AMONG THE HIGHEST MORTALITY RATES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE. SADLY, ISLAMIC NATIONS MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF COUNTRIES WITH UNDER-FIVE MORTALITY RATES EXCEEDING 200 DEATHS PER 1,000.

8. MANY OF THESE CHILDREN SUFFER DISEASES SUCH AS MEASLES, MALARIA AND RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS – DISEASES THAT CAN LARGELY BE AVERTED AND PREVENTED.

9. WHILE WE MAY NOT BE PLEASED TO HEAR IT, SOME HAVE SAID THAT THE STATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES IS A TRAGEDY. IT IS A TRAGEDY, NOT ONLY BECAUSE THE OUTLOOK IS BLEAK; IT IS A TRAGEDY BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH THAT WE CAN DO TO PREVENT NEEDLESS DEATH AND SUFFERING.

10. LET US TAKE CHILDHOOD VACCINATION AS AN EXAMPLE. IN WESTERN COUNTRIES, “KILLER” DISEASES LIKE POLIO ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE LONG BEEN ERADICATED. IN CONTRAST, THE POLIO VIRUS CONTINUES TO THREATEN MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES.

11. THE SITUATION IS COMPOUNDED BY A FUNDING GAP IN IMMUNISATION; A GLARING DEFICIT IN THE PRODUCTION OF VACCINES AMONG O.I.C. MEMBER COUNTRIES; AND CONCERNS OVER THE ACCEPTABILITY AND QUALITY OF VACCINES. CLEARLY, WE HAVE MUCH TO DO AS MANY OF THE WORLD’S MUSLIMS LIVE IN CONDITIONS THAT EXPOSE THEM TO THE MOST VIRULENT, YET MOST PREVENTABLE, INFECTIONS.

12. ON THAT NOTE, I BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE SOME REASON TO FEEL HOPEFUL. WHILE WE CLEARLY HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO, I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE PUTTING TOGETHER A PLAN ON THE WAY FORWARD; THIS CONFERENCE IS A CLEAR TESTAMENT TO THAT. FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE BEGUN TO MAKE HEADWAY ON SOME THE INITIATIVES BEING IMPLEMENTED.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

13. IN THE MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH DECLARATION OF 2005, THE 3RD SESSION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE DECLARED:

“... WE CONSIDER THE ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY, DISEASES, AND EPIDEMICS, AND THE FIGHT TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN ISLAMIC STATES AS URGENT, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES REQUIRING US TO DRUM UP ALL NECESSARY RESOURCES.”

14. AND DRUM THEM UP, WE HAVE SEVERAL INITIATIVES ALREADY UNDERWAY TOWARDS IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES. NOTABLY, THE ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK (I.D.B.) HAS PUSHED FOR A PROGRAMME FOR SELF-RELIANCE IN VACCINE PRODUCTION, TO ENSURE THAT THE ISLAMIC WORLD HAS ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, SAFE AND EFFECTIVE VACCINES. THIS PROGRAMME IS NOW IN ITS SEVENTH YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION. FURTHERMORE, THE I.D.B. HAS BEEN MANDATED TO COORDINATE WITH THE O.I.C. GENERAL SECRETARIAT TO MAKE NECESSARY CONTACTS WITH THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (W.H.O.) AND OTHER RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS TO DRAW UP A PROGRAMME FOR COMBATTING DISEASE AND EPIDEMICS, TO BE FINANCED THROUGH A SPECIAL FUND THAT WILL BE CREATED WITHIN THE I.D.B..

15. AS SUCH, WE ARE MAKING SOME PROGRESS TOWARDS IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC HEALTH AMONG O.I.C. MEMBER COUNTRIES. GOING FORWARD, WE NEED TO INTENSIFY OUR COOPERATION, AND BRING IT UP SEVERAL LEVELS.

16. FIRSTLY, WE NEED TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC AREAS FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION. ONE OF THE AREAS RIPE FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION IS IN THE WORK OF VACCINE PRODUCTION. AS PART OF OUR EMPHASIS ON BIOTECHNOLOGY, MALAYSIA HAS RECENTLY ESTABLISHED THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR NATURAL PRODUCTS, VACCINES AND BIOLOGICALS ("9BIO") AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR R&D IN VACCINE PRODUCTION. "9BIO" WILL BE MALAYSIA'S FRONT-LINE AGENCY IN WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHERS IN PROMOTING FURTHER SELF-RELIANCE IN VACCINE PRODUCTION.

17. DEVELOPMENT OF HALAL VACCINES IS ANOTHER AREA OF INTEREST. TO THIS END, "9BIO" IS WORKING TOGETHER WITH MALAYSIA'S DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT MALAYSIA (JAKIM) TOWARDS THE CERTIFICATION OF HALAL VACCINES. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF HALAL VACCINES WOULD BREAK NEW GROUND FOR PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CONCEPT OF HALAL – WHICH DENOTES QUALITY, PURITY AND SAFETY – WILL EMPOWER AUTHORITIES AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO MOBILISE COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE ACCESS TO CHILDHOOD VACCINATION AND ALLEVIATE FEARS AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITIES ABOUT CONTAMINATION AND THE EFFECTS OF VACCINES. AS SUCH, WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH OTHERS TOWARDS FURTHER DEVELOPING THE PRODUCTION PROCESS AND CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORKS FOR HALAL VACCINES. THIS WILL HELP TO ENSURE WIDESPREAD ACCEPTABILITY OF HALAL VACCINES ACROSS THE MUSLIM WORLD.

18. OF COURSE, MUTUAL COOPERATION IN PUBLIC HEALTH CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED TO THE ISSUE OF VACCINES ALONE. OTHER AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST WOULD INCLUDE INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS DURING HAJ PILGRIMAGES, GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION, MALARIA, H.I.V./AIDS, BIOSECURITY, EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES, INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS, AND OTHERS. CLEARLY, WE HAVE OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US.

19. SECONDLY, IN ORDER FOR US TO MOVE FORWARD, WE NEED TO BE OPEN AND TRANSPARENT, AND ENGAGE OTHER STAKEHOLDERS. I AM GLAD TO NOTE THAT VARIOUS ESTEEMED HEALTH-RELATED INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITIES, SUCH AS THE W.H.O., UNICEF, AND THE CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL (C.D.C.) OF THE UNITED STATES, ARE ALSO PARTICIPATING IN THIS IMPORTANT CONFERENCE.

20. MY HOPE IS THAT YOUR ATTENDANCE TODAY WILL LEAD TO CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THE O.I.C. AND WITH INDIVIDUAL MUSLIM COUNTRIES, IN TACKLING SERIOUS THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH. WHILE WE TAKE COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL ACTION TO PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH QUALITY WITHIN THE O.I.C. MEMBER COUNTRIES, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FROM HEALTH-RELATED ORGANISATIONS WORLDWIDE.

21. THIRDLY, WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC HEALTH TO THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UMMAH. WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE O.I.C., WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO EMPHASISE DISCUSSIONS ON HEALTH, IN PARALLEL WITH OTHER TRACKS ON EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND OTHERS.

22. ON THIS NOTE, MALAYSIA IS PROUD TO HOST THIS INAUGURAL ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH, AND WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THIS CONFERENCE WILL BECOME A PERMANENT TRACK UNDER THE O.I.C. BANNER.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

23. THEY SAY TIME AND TIDE WAITS FOR NO MAN. TO THE CREDIT OF THE O.I.C., WE DID NOT WAIT TO TURN THE TIDE. WHILE WE CANNOT BE IN DENIAL THAT THERE IS MUCH TO DO, I BELIEVE THAT SOME OF THE GOOD WORK THAT WE ARE PUTTING IN WILL SHOW RESULTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. GOING FORWARD, WE MUST CONTINUE TO PURSUE STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES THAT ARE SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIVE TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS, AND THAT CONTINUES TO LEVERAGE UPON COLLECTIVE WILL AND JOINT ACTION ON THE PART OF O.I.C. MEMBER COUNTRIES. MOST CRITICALLY, WE MUST POOL OUR RESOURCES, SHARE EXPERTISE AND WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF THE UMMAH.

24. I HOPE THAT THIS CONFERENCE WILL HELP TO BUILD UPON SOME OF THE PROGRESS THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE, AND ALSO HELP TO POINT THE WAY TOWARDS NEW ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESSES. MAY ALLAH S.W.T. SHOWER US WITH HIS BLESSINGS AND GUIDE US IN THIS MOST NOBLE ENDEAVOUR TO ENHANCE THE HEALTH OF MUSLIMS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

25. ON THAT NOTE, WITH THE RECITATION OF "BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM", IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO DECLARE OPEN THE KUALA LUMPUR O.I.C. HEALTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2007.

THANK YOU.