

**SPEECH BY
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"NATION BUILDING IN A PLURAL SOCIETY"
AT UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
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The Rector of the University of Sarajevo,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here in this beautiful city, in a country full of history. I thank the University of Sarajevo for inviting me to deliver today's public lecture, on a subject which I know is very close to the hearts of both the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the people of Malaysia. I shall speak about the best way forward for economic and social development in a plural society such as ours in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Malaysia.

2. But first, let me say how delighted I am to see Sarajevo in revival. I was here in 1997 and I saw then the distressing aftermath of war. I witnessed much physical destruction and the people were dispirited. I am very impressed with the reconstruction that has taken place in the last ten years. And I see smiles on the faces of the people in this city. We know that Sarajevo has a very long history, including a past full of grandeur. I pray for the wellbeing of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and for a peaceful and prosperous future of this ancient land. I am confident that, one day, Sarajevo will thrive once again in all its splendor.

3. I am very happy to be visiting again because the people of Malaysia and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been close friends even before this nation attained its full sovereign identity in 1995. We were with you when you were fighting for your survival. Malaysia was part of the United Nations forces which helped maintain the peace after the war. We have come in a modest way to participate in your socio-economic reconstruction. For example, a joint venture between a Malaysian and a local company built two blocks of the Clinical Centre in this University. In the near future, we hope to do more in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the economic field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. There is a significant similarity between your country and ours. Like Malaysia, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. We have three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, and you also have three major ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And, in both countries, the three groups practise different forms of worship. In view of the similarity between our two countries in many ways, I shall take the opportunity today to relate to you the story of nation-building in Malaysia. The purpose is to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to draw lessons from the Malaysian experience, and decide what is best to be done in this country.

5. This year, 2007, Malaysia celebrates the 50th anniversary of the country's independence. We are proud to say that we shall also be celebrating 50 years of stability and socio-economic progress. The secret of our successes lies in our success of forging national unity among the people of Malaysia.

6. In a plural society that Malaysia is, the need to be just and fair towards all without distinction as to race or religion forms an integral component of the principles in developing a stable, peaceful and prosperous country. We conscientiously cherish our diversity as a treasured national asset which contributes to the unity, creativity, resourcefulness and enhancement of the Malaysian success story. It also makes all Malaysians recognize the imperative of maintaining inter-communal and inter-religious peace.

7. To ensure peace and harmony among the diverse population, we really had no choice but to abide by the principle of mutual respect and accommodation. To ensure that no part of the society is neglected, we instituted a system of power sharing in the running of the government. The government takes important policy decisions on the basis of consensus in the Cabinet. In this way, the representatives of the minority in the government are never marginalized or outvoted. In fact, this is the hallmark of democracy in Malaysia.

8. We also decided that economic development and social progress can only take place in an environment of political stability. This was the main inducement for us to adopt the political formula of power sharing. And this has served Malaysia well. Ever since the country's independence in 1957, the same Government has been in place, exercising the powers of governing in the form of a coalition of political parties called the National Front.

9. The National Front is a coalition of 14 political parties, comprising three major political parties representing the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, plus 11 other smaller parties representing other smaller groups in the country. The most dominant partner in the National Front Coalition Government is the political party representing the ethnic Malays all of whom are Muslims.

10. However, we have made Islam the unifying rather than a dividing factor in the Malaysian political system. We call the approach Islam Hadhari or Civilizational Islam. Underlying the whole message of Islam Hadhari is a call for tolerance towards people of other faiths. The teachings of Islam are undoubtedly the foundation and inspiration for our actions but the benefits are intended for equitable sharing by all Malaysians, Muslims as well as non-Muslims alike. This includes, as a matter of priority, the development of education, human capital, the economy and social institutions.

11. I would like to highlight the fact that we place a very high premium on the ability of the government to provide educational opportunities and on the capability of the people to have access to education. This is because the acquisition of knowledge is key to elevating the poor from poverty. Education and the power of knowledge is the greatest equalizer among individuals in a society and the greatest leveller which can bridge the prosperity gap among nation states in this globalised world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. The development model adopted by Malaysia is based on a philosophy of growth with equity or, more specifically, growth with equitable distribution. For a heterogeneous society like Malaysia, it was crucial to adopt this strategy.

13. The need to ensure an equitable distribution of the country's wealth is a continuing challenge for us in Malaysia because economic disparities continue to exist among the various ethnic groups. This is a challenge not unique to Malaysia, and it certainly applies in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well.

14. We have used our series of Five-Year Development Plans, which is part and parcel of the process of implementing the overarching New Economic Policy, as the blueprint to affirmatively spread the wealth among the multi-ethnic population. It does not prejudice any particular group because the distribution of wealth is effected on the basis of an ever expanding economic cake. Our long term objective is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty among all Malaysians, irrespective of their ethnic background. We also wish to restructure the Malaysian society to correct the economic imbalances among ethnic groups, reduce and eventually eradicate the identification of ethnicity with economic function.

15. We publicly declare to the people of Malaysia that it is the intention of the government to nurture into being a progressive community that is firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam but compatible with modernity. You can accurately say that the Government in Malaysia is Islamic based, but it governs fairly and justly on behalf of all the multi-ethnic and multi-religious citizens of Malaysia. The Malaysian national agenda is premised on the equitable sharing of the country's wealth, harmony and goodwill. Islam Hadhari calls for the enhancement of the quality of life of everyone irrespective of their religious beliefs. This has ensured domestic peace and stability and gives Malaysia a good name internationally as a tolerant society.

16. Although I have elaborated the Malaysian nation-building experience in some detail, I would equally emphasize that no two countries are really alike in all respects. Bosnia and Herzegovina would need to draw its own indigenous plans for development and wealth creation as well as establish its own formula for establishing unity among the diverse population in this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. Regarding the Malaysian economic model for development and strategy for wealth creation, I would like to say a little more about the critical decision we took to establish a synergistic relationship between the public and private sectors in Malaysia. The whole nation is conceptualized as a corporate entity, jointly owned by both the public and private sectors. We have labelled the approach as "Malaysia Incorporated", symbolizing the requirement for both parties to work closely together in pursuit of the common national agenda.

18. To put the Malaysia Incorporated concept into practice, we established several mechanisms and adopted specific methodologies, the most important of which is the reduction of bureaucracy. These included the deregulation of cumbersome rules and procedures and the institutionalization of consultative mechanisms. With the reduction of bureaucracy, the private sector was able to make more profits which, in turn, came back to the Government coffers in the form of larger amounts of tax returns.

19. We would like to think that the positive results of this approach are self-evident and open for verification. Fifty years ago, Malaysia was merely the largest producer of rubber and tin in the world. Today, Malaysia is ranked by the World Trade

Organization as the 19th largest trading nation in the world in 2006, as we have now become one of the world's largest exporters not only of manufactured goods but also of services.

20. Malaysia transformed itself from an agriculture based economy to a centre for labour-intensive manufacturing, before moving to high technology, skills and capital-intensive manufacturing. Bosnia and Herzegovina can emulate the Malaysian example or Bosnia-Herzegovina can adopt a different approach for wealth creation and sustainable growth. The important thing is to have detailed forward planning including clear targets to be achieved, for the short, medium and long term.

21. As a case study in nation building, we offer the Malaysian political and economic experience for study by our friends in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This includes the practice of Islam Hadhari as an integral part of the process of nation building in our country. However, the values which are being expounded through Islam Hadhari are universal in character. It calls for putting into practice, among others, justice, freedom, love of knowledge, balanced development, a good quality of life for the people, protection of minorities, including women, and moral integrity. The objective is to allow the minority groups, and women, equal opportunity to develop their full potentials without discrimination or undue hindrance. In the context of contributing to international peace and prosperity, we hope to showcase Malaysia as a Muslim country which is moderate, modern, prosperous and at peace with itself and with its neighbours and the rest of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Malaysia has a strong track record of fulfilling its international obligations and responsibilities. Therefore, on the issue of bridging the gap in the cultural divide which now exists in our world, Malaysia will be fully supportive of any effort aimed at generating greater understanding between religions and peoples, especially between those of the Christian west and the world of Islam. In particular, we would like such a dialogue to expose the fact that Islam is a religion which espouses universalism, not exclusivism.

23. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the unique position of being a country in the heart of Europe which has a significant Muslim component in its population. This gives Bosnia and Herzegovina the unique opportunity to showcase the true nature of Islam and show by example how Muslims can easily coexist with peoples of other religions. Bosnia and Herzegovina can demonstrate to the world that Islam is no barrier to peace and progress.

24. At the global level, however, the international community must acknowledge the fact that real peace and security cannot be established until solutions are found to resolve the critical political and strategic issues of the day. I am referring to the history of competition for political, strategic or territorial gains which has left a legacy of gnawing problems in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and the Golan Heights in Syria. Of course, topping the list of unresolved problems is the plight and suffering of the people of Palestine. The latest, dangerous developments in Gaza is a stark reminder to us all to act without delay.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

25. When peace does return to the trouble spots of the world, the daunting task of nation building awaits them in all those countries which have been devastated by war.

26. The simple truth is that nation building is necessarily a joint effort by both the government and the governed.

27. The people at large and civil society, including institutions of higher learning such as the University of Sarajevo, are all stakeholders in the process of nation building.

28. I must reemphasize, however, that national unity is essential for any nation building effort to succeed. If there is no national unity, nations may even fall apart.

I thank you for your attention.