

**SPEECH BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED ISLAMIC STUDIES
(I.A.I.S.), AT JALAN ELMU, OFF JALAN UNIVERSITI
9 OCTOBER 2008**

BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

ASSALAMUALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUH

AND GOOD AFTERNOON

PROFESSOR DR. MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI

CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O., I.A.I.S.

EXCELLENCIES AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ORGANISERS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HERE TODAY, AT THE AUSPICIOUS LAUNCH OF A NEW INSTITUTION: THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED ISLAMIC STUDIES (I.A.I.S.) MALAYSIA.

2. THE IDEA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THIS INSTITUTE CAME ABOUT LAST YEAR WHEN I FOUND OUT THAT PROFESSOR HASHIM KAMALI, WHOM I HAVE KNOWN FOR MANY YEARS, HAD ACCEPTED AN APPOINTMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND WAS GETTING READY TO LEAVE MALAYSIA. TO ME, PROFESSOR HASHIM, ALTHOUGH AN AFGHAN BY BIRTH, IS A MALAYSIAN SCHOLAR. IN FACT, HE IS A MALAYSIAN SCHOLAR WITH A BRILLIANT INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT IN THE FIELD OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND JURISPRUDENCE. HIS DEPARTURE WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ENORMOUS LOSS IN TERMS OF BRAIN DRAIN, AND WE WOULD BE LEFT REGRETTING ABOUT WHY WE DID NOT DO ANYTHING TO KEEP HIM HERE WITH US.

3. I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO APPROACH HIM, AND ASKED HIM WHETHER HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN SETTING UP A NEW INSTITUTE DEDICATED TO RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF ISLAMIC STUDIES. I PROMISED HIM THAT THE INSTITUTE WOULD BE AUTONOMOUS, THEREBY ALLOWING FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, AND WOULD INITIALLY BE SUPPORTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA DURING ITS FOUNDATION YEARS. I WANTED HIM TO RECRUIT THE BEST ISLAMIC SCHOLARS TO BE BASED AT THIS INSTITUTE, TO DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO RESEARCH IN ORDER TO ENRICH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION.

4. FOR ME, THIS INSTITUTE IS A TIMELY ADDITION TO THE VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS THAT WE ALREADY HAVE IN MALAYSIA DEDICATED TO ISLAM. BOTH THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILISATION (ISTAC) ARE DEDICATED TOWARDS TEACHING AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL. INSTITUT KEFAHAMAN ISLAM MALAYSIA OR IKIM FOCUSES ON FOSTERING ISLAMIC UNDERSTANDING TO SOCIETY AT LARGE. BUT I FELT THAT WE STILL LACKED AN INSTITUTION THAT WOULD UNDERTAKE ADVANCED RESEARCH INTO ISLAM AND ON ISSUES THAT RELATE TO THE ISLAMIC

WORLD SUCH AS ISLAMIC LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY, GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY, CIVILISATIONAL STUDIES, INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND SYARIAH REFORM.

5. I TOLD PROFESSOR HASHIM THIS WOULD BE AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR US TO SET UP SUCH AN INSTITUTION. I WAS PLEASED THAT HE ACCEPTED MY PROPOSAL AND EVEN MORE PLEASED THAT HE INCORPORATED ISLAM HADHARI AS A CORE RESEARCH AREA FOR THE INSTITUTE. I STILL FEEL THAT ISLAM HADHARI HAS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD BY MANY, ESPECIALLY IN ACADEMIA, AND HOPE THAT THE RESEARCH DONE AT I.A.I.S. WOULD PROVIDE INTELLECTUAL AND ANALYTICAL RIGOUR TO THE APPROACH OF CIVILISATIONAL RENEWAL ESPOUSED BY ISLAM HADHARI.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

6. ISLAM IS A BEAUTIFUL RELIGION, WHICH BRINGS WITHIN IT COMPREHENSIVE AND UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN SOUL, AND THE ATTAINMENT OF SUCCESS IN THIS LIFE AND IN THE HERE-AFTER. THIS DIVINE MESSAGE GAVE LIFE TO A GLORIOUS CIVILISATION, AND BROUGHT FORTH A SYMPHONY OF PEACE AND HARMONY INTO THE HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN ACROSS THE CENTURIES.

7. HOWEVER, THE GLORIES OF MUSLIM CIVILISATION HAVE FADED INTO AN OBSCURE HAZE OF HISTORY. THE SYMPHONY THAT ONCE PLAYED WITH GREAT JOY ACROSS THE GREAT EXPANSE OF MUSLIM HEARTS AND MINDS, HAS DESCENDED INTO A CACOPHONY OF ANGER AND RECRIMINATION.

8. WE SEE THIS CONFLICT PLAY ITSELF OUT IN THE SECTARIAN ARGUMENTS THAT CONTINUE TO PLAGUE CONTEMPORARY INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD. A NUMBER OF OUR SCHOLARS AND THINKERS REMAIN TRAPPED IN FUTILE MADHAB CONFLICTS, WHICH BRING VERY LITTLE BENEFIT TO THE UMMAH. ALL AROUND, WE WITNESS A GROWING PREVALENCE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND ERRORS IN KNOWLEDGE.

9. THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MUSLIM UMMAH CAN CLEARLY BE TRACED TO THIS PERSISTENT TENDENCY AMONG THE MUSLIMS TO OBSESS OVER MINOR SECTARIAN ISSUES, AND LOSE SIGHT OF THE GREATER THEMES THAT UNITE US. SUCH DISAGREEMENTS THEN BEGIN TO POISON OUR DISCOURSE, LEADING US INTO ERROR AND CONFUSION, AND HENCE RESULTING IN CONFLICTS. EVENTUALLY, SUCH TURMOIL LEADS TO DISUNITY WITHIN THE UMMAH, AND THE INEVITABLE DECLINE AND FALL OF MUSLIM CIVILISATION.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

10. IF THE MUSLIM UMMAH WANTS TO RECLAIM ITS ROLE AS A CIVILISATIONAL FORCE FOR GOOD, THEN WE MUST BEGIN WITH CORRECTING THE ERRORS IN KNOWLEDGE THAT PLAGUE THE MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL SPHERES. ONLY THEN CAN THE MUSLIMS BEGIN TO RETURN TO THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE AS THE "UMMATAN WASATAA" – "THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE PATH":

"THUS WE HAVE MADE YOU A MIDDLE COMMUNITY ("UMMATAN WASATAA") THAT YOU MIGHT BE WITNESSES OVER PEOPLE, AND THE MESSENGER A WITNESS OVER YOU."

[AL BAQARAH AYAT 143]

11. THE "UMMATAN WASATAA" ARE THE MUSLIMS WHO WILL BECOME THE SHINING BEACONS FOR HUMANITY; THOSE WHO REMAIN TRUE TO THE FOUNDING PRECEPTS OF IMAN AND ISLAM, WHILE ALWAYS CHOOSING THE PATH OF MODERATION, AND REJECTING ALL FORMS OF EXTREMISM.

12. ON THE ONE HAND, THE BEAUTY OF ISLAM LIES IN ITS NATURE AS A UNIVERSAL RELIGION THAT EMPHASISES UNIVERSAL VALUES AND IDEAS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL HUMANITY. IT IS THESE UNIVERSAL TEACHINGS WHICH WOULD HELP ELEVATE THE THINKING OF THE UMMAH, PROMOTE A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AMONG THE MUSLIMS, AND HELP THE MUSLIMS ADDRESS THE VARIOUS ISSUES POSED BY ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM.

13. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE ALSO NEED AN APPROACH THAT IS ROOTED IN THE REALITIES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. THIS WILL REQUIRE SOLUTIONS WHICH ARE REALISTIC AND PRAGMATIC, WHICH CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AND ADOPTED BY THE UMMAH IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

14. IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY RECONCILE BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF TIMELESS MUSLIM PRINCIPLES AND THE NEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN "UMMATAN WASATAA" MUST BE PREMISED UPON OPENNESS AND DIALOGUE. THROUGH THE SHARING OF IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES, COMMON PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS ARE EMPHASISED, WHILE DIFFERENCES AND DISAGREEMENTS ARE DEFUSED AND DISMANTLED.

15. SUCH DIALOGUES COULD BE CONDUCTED WITHIN THE MUSLIM UMMAH, AS WELL AS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE RECENT PROLIFERATION OF DIALOGUES BETWEEN CULTURES AND CIVILISATIONS – FOR INSTANCE, THE U.N.-SPONSORED AGENDA ON "ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS" – IS NOT ONLY WELCOME, BUT MAY PROVE TO BE NECESSARY IN A GLOBALISED WORLD WHICH MUST CONTEND WITH VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF PLURALISM.

16. OVER AND ABOVE THE NECESSARY REQUIREMENT FOR OPENNESS AND DIALOGUE, I BELIEVE THAT THE EVENTUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF AN "UMMATAN WASATAA" CAN ONLY TRULY SUCCEED WHEN WE RETURN TO THE TRADITIONAL IDEA OF RENEWAL OR TAJDID .

17. FROM A CIVILISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, THE IMPERATIVE FOR "TAJDID" IS NOT ONLY DESIRABLE, BUT NECESSARY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WHEN WE RECALL THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS WITHIN THE MUSLIM WORLD: MANY MUSLIMS TODAY CONTINUE TO LIVE IN HUNGER AND POVERTY, AND BEREFT OF LEADERSHIP AT THE GLOBAL ARENA.

18. WITH THIS IN MIND, WE MUST PURSUE THE IDEALS OF "TAJDID" COMPREHENSIVELY – NOT MERELY IN THE REALM OF THE SYARIAH ALONE, BUT MORE BROADLY, IN THE HOPE OF FOSTERING THE GLORIOUS UMMAH WE REMEMBER. THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IS: HOW DO WE STRIKE THE FINE BALANCE IN APPROACHING BOTH OUR DIVERSE PROBLEMS, AND YET RESPECTING THE TENETS THAT DEFINE US COLLECTIVELY AS AN UMMAH?.

19. IN THIS REGARD, THE CONCEPT OF "UMMATAN WASATAA" IS A REMINDER THAT MUSLIM CIVILISATION MUST ALWAYS STRIVE TO WALK THE PATH OF MODERATION AND TOLERANCE. FOR THIS TO OCCUR, MUSLIMS MUST CONSTANTLY BE VIGILANT, AND BE PREPARED TO UNDERTAKE EFFORTS TOWARDS RENEWING

THE CIVILISATIONAL APPROACH OF THE UMMAH.

20. IN THIS CONTEXT, ISLAM HADHARI SHOULD BE SEEN AS AN APPROACH TOWARDS REBUILDING THE "UMMATAN WASATAA" THAT WAS ONCE THE ESSENCE OF MUSLIM CIVILISATION. I WOULD LIKE TO THINK OF ISLAM HADHARI AS A STRUGGLE TO FIND THE PATH OF "WASATIYYAH" (OR MODERATION) AMONGST UNIVERSAL IDEALS THAT WE CONVENIENTLY TAKE FOR GRANTED. IF GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIETIES CLOSELY ABIDE BY THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM HADHARI, INSYA ALLAH WE WILL FIND OURSELVES WELL ON THAT RIGHTEOUS PATH THAT WE SEEK AND DESIRE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

21. ALTHOUGH WE NOW LIVE IN A WORLD MORE CONNECTED THAN EVER, THE WORK OF UNDERSTANDING AND PEACEFULLY LIVING WITH OTHER PEOPLES AND CULTURES IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE. THIS IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT FOR A NATION LIKE MALAYSIA, WHICH CONTINUES TO DISCOVER NEW CHALLENGES IN MANAGING AND BALANCING EXPECTATIONS IN A MULTI CULTURAL AND MULTI RELIGIOUS SOCIETY.

22 SUCH CHALLENGES INCLUDE THOSE RELATING TO CONVERSIONS, PLACES OF WORSHIP, AND INTER-MARRIAGES. IN RESOLVING SUCH DIFFICULT ISSUES WE NEED TO GO BACK TO THE BASIC ISLAMIC VALUES OF JUSTICE, PIETY AND COMPASSION. OUR ULAMAS AND THEOLOGISTS MUST UPHOLD THESE VALUES IN THEIR DECREES; WHILE OUR JUDGES AND LAWYERS MUST DELIVER THESE VALUES IN THEIR ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW.

23. WE CANNOT TAKE FOR GRANTED THAT THESE PROBLEMS WILL EVER BE SOLVED IN ANY FINAL WAY. NEVERTHELESS, WE CAN CERTAINLY BEGIN THE GREAT WORK OF DISCOVERING CONCRETE SOLUTIONS FOR SUCH CHALLENGES.

24. IN THIS REGARD, I WELCOME THE ESTABLISHMENT OF I.A.I.S. AS AN INSTITUTION THAT DEALS WITH IMPORTANT ISSUES PERTAINING TO ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM UMMAH. A RESEARCH INSTITUTION SUCH AS I.A.I.S. IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF UMMAH-BUILDING EFFORTS THAT IS SORELY NEEDED WITHIN THE MUSLIM WORLD. CERTAINLY, I CAN SEE I.A.I.S. PLAYING A LEADING ROLE IN INITIATING NOVEL APPROACHES TOWARDS SOLVING CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS FACED BY THE UMMAH.

25. IN THE COURSE OF SUCH WORK, I.A.I.S. WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS WHICH INVOLVE WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AS WELL AS THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS WHICH CONSTITUTE THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY. IN PARTICULAR, THESE EFFORTS COULD EXPAND AND DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEN COMPONENT PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM HADHARI AND ALLOW FOR MORE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN AREAS SUCH AS GOVERNMENT POLICY AND EXECUTION. THROUGH DILIGENT WORK AND CLOSE CO-OPERATION WITH THE RELEVANT STAKE HOLDERS, I AM CONFIDENT THAT I.A.I.S. CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN UMMAH-BUILDING EFFORTS IN MALAYSIA, AS WELL AS IN THE WIDER MUSLIM WORLD.

26. FOR A START I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE THE IMMEDIATE COUNSEL OF I.A.I.S. ON SOME CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES THAT NEED SOLUTIONS. THESE INCLUDE CONVERSIONS AND COMPLICATIONS THAT ARISE WHEN INTER-MARRIAGES ARE

DISSOLVED. ﷺ I DO NOT WANT SUCH ISSUES TO CONTINUE TO PLAGUE OUR MULTI ETHNIC AND MULTI RELIGIOUS SOCIETY. ﷺ I HOPE TO GET VIEWS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS AS WELL – BEFORE ENGAGING WITH AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR ISLAMIC ADMINISTRATION – TO FIND SOLUTIONS THAT WILL PREVENT SIMILAR CONTROVERSIES TO THOSE THAT HAVE SURFACED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

27. MANY TIMES IN THE QUR'AN, ALLAH S.W.T. MAKES REFERENCE TO "AL-INSAN" – THE MANKIND TO WHOM ALLAH'S REVELATION HAS BEEN SENT DOWN AS A GUIDE TOWARDS SUCCESS IN THIS WORLD AND IN THE HERE-AFTER.

28. I BELIEVE IT IS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT THAT "AL-INSAN" IS DERIVED FROM THE ROOT WORD "NASIYA", WHICH MEANS "TO FORGET". FOR IT IS WITHIN THE NATURE OF HUMANITY TO FORGET.

29. ALLAH, OUR CREATOR, KNOWING FULL WELL THE HUMAN PROPENSITY TO FORGET, HAS BROUGHT DOWN UPON US REVELATION THAT CONSTANTLY REMINDS US OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ENCOURAGES US TO REMAIN ON THE STRAIGHT PATH.

30. UNFORTUNATELY, FOR MANY OF US TODAY, FORGETFULNESS HAS OVERPOWERED OUR MEMORY. MANY OF US HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT IT MEANS TO PRACTICE EXCELLENCE IN OUR LIVES; MANY OF US HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE "UMMATAN WASATAA" THAT LIGHTS THE WAY FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW.

31. MANY TIMES OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, I HAVE EMPHASISED THAT ISLAM HADHARI IS NOT A NEW RELIGION, NOR IS IT A NEW MADHAB. RATHER, I THINK OF ISLAM HADHARI AS A TOOL THAT HELPS US TO RENEW OUR MEMORY OF EXCELLENCE AND GREATNESS. THROUGH ITS TEN PRINCIPLES, IT REMINDS US ﷺ THAT THE MUSLIM UMMAH CAN AND SHOULD ASPIRE TOWARDS THE HEAVENS, IN THE SAME WAY THAT OUR FORE FATHERS DID DURING THE HEYDAY OF MUSLIM CIVILISATION.

32. THE JOURNEY OF TAJDID – AS A MEANS OF RENEWING MUSLIM CIVILISATIONAL SUCCESS – WILL BE LONG AND HARD. AND IT IS A NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY – FOR AS LONG AS IT IS WITHIN HUMAN NATURE TO FORGET, IT IS WITHIN OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTINUE THE WORK OF RENEWAL WITHIN THE MUSLIM UMMAH. ISLAM HADHARI IS ONE SUCH PATH ALONG THIS JOURNEY, AND I HOPE THE I.A.I.S. WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD UPON THE WORK ALREADY DONE TOWARDS CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE OF ALLAH'S FAVOUR UPON HUMANITY, AND OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LIVE UP TO ISLAM'S BEAUTIFUL CREED.

33. ON THAT NOTE, WITH THE RECITATION OF BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM, IT IS NOW MY PRIVILEGE TO OFFICIALLY LAUNCH THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED ISLAMIC STUDIES (I.A.I.S.) MALAYSIA.

THANK YOU.