

Opening Address at ISI's World Statistics Congress 2019

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 62ND INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE
(ISI) WORLD STATISTICS CONGRESS (WSC) 2019**

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INTRODUCTION

1. It is a pleasure to be here at the 62nd International Statistical Institute (ISI) World Statistics Congress (WSC) 2019 this afternoon. It is truly an honour and a milestone for Malaysia to be hosting this prestigious, international event for the very first time since the first ISI WSC 132 years ago. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers and welcome everybody to this congress.

2. The word “statistics” may sound irrelevant to some people, but the truth is statistics play an important role in our daily lives. Statistics connects us to what is happening around us and it helps us make good decisions and lead better lives.

EVOLUTION OF STATISTICS

3. Going back as far as the 17th century, statistics has been used by rulers and kings in the administration of the state. Births and deaths were counted to estimate the number of population. Revenue of taxations, trades and agriculture were calculated to estimate national income and ultimately the wealth of the state.

4. This in turn was used for allocation of resources. More importantly, statistics were used to assess the strength of the country and formulate defence strategies in times of war.

5. Centuries later, statistics have evolved and advanced as a scientific field that has led to the era of evidence-based policies. The tools of statistical inquiry continue to transform these services with new enlightened knowledge-based decision making.

THEME OF 62ND ISI WSC 2019

6. I have been informed that the ISI WSC 2019 with the theme Come, Connect, Create has brought together 2,500 delegates from approximately

130 countries. I believe this is the best platform for Malaysian and international parties to share insights on development in statistical science and to advance the application of statistics for discovery, innovation and decision making.

7. By hosting a congress of this scale, I am certain it will create interest not just with private or government entities, but also academic institutions. We want to challenge the young in our country to understand and grasp the importance of statistics in imparting knowledge.

8. We want them to understand that in order to shift Malaysia successfully as a leader in the digital economy, we need young minds to connect with people, businesses, devices, data and processes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

9. With information flooding in from various sources, it is of paramount importance to have a reliable, relevant and timely source for decision making, evaluations and assessments at different levels. The goal of statistical organisations is to produce relevant, objective and accurate

statistics of quality and integrity to keep users well informed and further assist in effective policies and decision-making. This will ensure an effective check-and-balance system.

10. This is practised globally, where statistics plays a vital role in making the world a better place by analysing and ensuring the integrity of data for countless individuals, businesses and government organisations.

11. For example, Statistics Norway distributes statistical software to distressed countries, including Eritrea, Albania and Uganda, to help them analyse population, housing and income data. These developing nations can then analyse data, map the results, identify people's most pressing needs and share the resulting information with government and non-government organisations to better target assistance.

12. Closer to home, spatial and statistical methodologies were developed to integrate multiple factors and measure the hazard, vulnerability and risk of tsunami hazard in Indonesian regions and provinces, using previous map-based data of Kuta and Sanur in Bali, Lombok and Aceh in Indonesia. This is not only to be aware and prepare for if and when another disaster hit, but also to create disaster mitigation plan and as inputs for long term town planning strategies.

13. During my previous tenure as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, when we were hit by the 1997 Financial Crisis, we decided not to seek IMF's assistance as we wanted the option of determining our own policies. The Government was able to maintain socially-oriented policies such as controls on the prices of some essential consumer items and subsidies on a few consumer items. We were also able to maintain the policies on privatisation, and on the extent and rate of financial and trade liberalisation.

14. The National Economic Action Council (NEAC) was formed to take charge of the economic crisis management. Eventually, it was the NEAC that drew up an alternative medium-term strategy to deal with the crisis. It also intensely monitored all aspects of the economy and made decisions on a day-to-day basis. This proved that official statistics played an integral part as a monitoring tool in helping to stabilise this crisis.

15. I cannot stress enough on how important the role of statistics is in national development. Statistics on population and demography, education, health, public safety, communication and recreation are used to monitor the nation's quality of life and well-being. The statistics of GDP, inflation rate, poverty, income inequality and gross national income per capita are used to gauge the economic performance and the national wealth.

16. Ultimately, these statistics are vital for implementing the shared prosperity approach to ensure the income gap and people's wealth would be looked into; to create a more structured, progressive, knowledge-based and high-value economy; and to ensure Malaysia becomes an important economic axis in Asia.

17. Since its inception in 1949, the national statistical system led by Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) continues to serve as the national statistics provider. Besides the conventional ways of collecting data through censuses and surveys, the national statistical system has embarked on tapping data from the administrative sources through data sharing arrangements between agencies.

18. The users of statistics have evolved from the development of blue-print and policies to every walk of life. As the statistical system celebrates its 70th year of existence in Malaysia, I urge all of you to continue to push boundaries and move forward to be at the forefront of the world statistical system.

CHALLENGES OF THE STATISTICAL COMMUNITY

19. Developing new statistical methods cannot be done in a vacuum. As motivation, you need a connection with actual issues that arise in real

application areas. Global politics, demographic and socioeconomic landscapes have changed rapidly, brought about by the digital revolution.

20. This has witnessed the transformation of the global economy at breakneck speed. The pillar of the digital economy is the increasing interconnectedness of people, organisations, and machines that results from the Internet, mobile technology and the internet of things (IoT).

21. The emergence of the digital economy has forever altered the conventional ways of how businesses are structured; how firms interact; and how consumers obtain services, information, and goods. This includes, but not limited to the Fourth Industrial Revolution which entails automation of work processes, artificial intelligence and digitally enabled manufacturing, distribution and warehousing platforms.

22. This also poses new challenges to the statistical community to harness the potential of digital revolutions and identify opportunities to further strengthen and enhance the national statistical system.

23. A smart way to respond to these challenges is by exploring and taking up Big Data Analytics (BDA) with all its potentials. Not only does BDA features volumes, velocity and variety, but also another significant aspect is

value. Moving from the usual methods of compiling data to adopting BDA will ensure the statistical system produces more relevant, timely and cost-effective products and services.

24. The national statistical system has ventured into BDA in selected areas including price and merchandise trade statistics. These initiatives should be commended. Befitting of its role as the national statistical office which is data-driven by nature, it is timely for DOSM to take up the lead in BDA with assistance and cooperation from all the ministries, agencies and statutory bodies in Malaysia.

25. More data professionals who can understand massive and complicated data through various statistical and ICT skills are needed. The demand for these high-quality talents is growing exponentially as government and private businesses reform processes to involve analytical and predictive insights. Accordingly, a strategic investment is crucial in enhancing the research and analytical capability within our country especially among the national statistical community.

26. Another challenge that can be observed these days is the notable global demographic shift. The world population has expanded from 3.7 billion in 1970 to approximately 7.7 billion this year. It is projected to further increase to 9.2 billion by 2040. Malaysia, like many other countries is part

of this transition, where the population grew from 10.9 million in 1970 to 32.7 million in 2019.

27. The share of ageing population aged 65 years and over has increased steadily since the 1970s, and the number is expected to triple from 2.2 million today to more than 6.0 million by 2040.

28. Along with these changes, the social backdrop has also evolved. In this regards, everybody should be on board the Population and Housing Census 2020 as the ultimate source of data on population, demography and social well-being. Beyond population count, the census aims to provide granular social indicators to facilitate the design and development of policies, programmes and the necessary infrastructures.

29. Finally, in keeping with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global economies are geared towards emphasising the 5Ps of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

30. Malaysia is committed to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that has been set and is mobilising efforts with other countries to end all forms of poverty, to fight inequalities and to tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

31. As such, it is important that we create an ideology that represents unity, sharing and adding value to each other. Countries must form a partnership regardless of economic standing, so globally we can overcome the challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation in order to achieve prosperity, and peace and justice in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

32. At this point, the prominent role as a focal point in the coordination of the development of SDG indicators in Malaysia is taken up by DOSM.

THE ROLE OF THE STATISTICAL COMMUNITY IN THE ERA OF CHANGE

33. All these challenges underscore data and statistics as the fuel that drive decision making. It enables the use of a scientific approach to investigate all the available evidence in formulating effective and target-specific policies and programmes. Statistics provide evidence which are necessary to improve decision making, document results and also enhance public accountability. Consequently, this will benefit the well-being of the nation and the economic growth of the country.

34. Statistics is impartial and it is colour blind. It provides truth and does not side with any parties. Therefore, it plays an important role in validating

findings and guiding policy decisions. As integrity and ethical principles are vital for the profession of statistics, it is the responsibility of the statistical community to uphold these principles and ensure statistics are not twisted or misinterpreted for personal gains.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

35. I am confident that hosting the 62nd ISI WSC 2019 will put Malaysia at the forefront of the international statistical fraternity. This event is the best platform to converge statistical knowledge at both regional and national levels. Let us leverage on the expertise of each and every one in this congress and work towards enhancing the field of statistical science for peace, progress and prosperity of the global community. I hope you have an enjoyable and productive session at the Congress.

36. We are also getting ready for Visit Malaysia 2020, a landmark campaign that is targeted to bring in at least 30 million international tourists to the country next year. In order to achieve these figures by 2020, we are taking the necessary steps to stay competitive and committed in changing trends to make Malaysia attractive to visitors.

37. To all delegates and participants of this congress, I urge you to take some time to experience our beautiful country and to promote it further when you get back home.

38. On that note, I hereby officiate the 62nd ISI WSC 2019.

39. Thank you and I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening.

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