

AT THE OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ISLAM AND
TECHNOLOGY
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Terlebih dahulu saya mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih kepada pihak Universiti Teknologi Malaysia kerana menjemput saya ke majlis ini, dan di atas penghormatan yang diberikan kepada saya untuk memberi ucapan dan seterusnya merasmikan pembukaan Persidangan ini.

2. Saya mengambil kesempatan ini untuk mengucap setinggi-tinggi tahniah kepada penganjur Persidangan di atas segala usaha bagi menjayakan Persidangan ini. Saya yakin, dengan penglibatan cerdik-pandai terkemuka yang diundang khas ke Persidangan ini, Persidangan ini akan mencapai maksud dan tujuannya dengan jayanya, insya-Allah.

3. I am greatly honoured to be given the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering of scholars. Though the majority of the participants are Malaysians, some have indeed travelled some distance from as far away as the USA. And though the subject of the Conference is Islam and Technology, I am happy to note that the Conference is not confined to only Muslim scholars. I am confident that with your varied background, experience, and expertise, this Conference is assured of success, insya-Allah.

4. Until quite recently, development has been construed as being incompatible with religion, in particular Islam. Islam was viewed as an obstacle to development. Even today there are people who still believe that religious values constitute a major obstacle to progress.

5. This view has been replaced slowly by a more positive stance among the academic circle, but there are Muslims who still reject progress and development as not in consonance with Islam. This is most unfortunate since Muslims constitute about a billion of the world population and Islam does subscribe to progress and development.

6. While Islam places importance on the hereafter, it does to do good. Only ignorance of the total philosophy and teaching of Islam makes one believe that Islam is opposed to development. It is true that there are certain aspects of development which is bad, and in such cases, they are not only not in line with Islamic principles, but also socially undesirable. But development and progress, within the parameters permitted by Islamic principles, can never be incompatible.

7. Knowledge is progress. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) told us to seek knowledge even to China. China at that time was not the centre of Islam but a centre of civilisation, and therefore, this urge to seek knowledge even to the remotest part of the world by the Prophet (s.a.w.) should make the Muslims truly aware of the importance of acquiring knowledge. Certainly what the Prophet (s.a.w.) meant then was not Islamic knowledge but the knowledge which is temporal in nature. At the same time, knowledge is not meant to replace our faith, but to support our faith. In many instances in the Quran, Allah (s.w.t.) draws our attention so that we reflect on the infinite cosmos and to creations as proof of His Existence, Oneness and Power.

8. In Islam, the quest for knowledge, and the satisfaction of our curiosity is a pursuit for truth. Knowledge is, therefore, not for the sake of knowledge, but for truth. In addition, knowledge is also to be of service to mankind. In other words, knowledge is subjective -- it should be in support of the quest for Divine truth and to serve the good of mankind.

9. There are branches of knowledge which need not necessarily lead us to Divine truth, but we cannot reject them as long as they can serve to improve our well-being. Mathematics, physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, engineering and others have been in the service of mankind from the beginning of man's history. Not only have this body of knowledge served us but they have also helped us to understand, to a certain extent, the mystery of creations. Early Muslim scholars had a share in the development of the various body of knowledge. It is unfortunate, however, that even though knowledge can help strengthen our faith and improve our well-being, there are individuals who preach the irrelevance of knowledge and progress to Muslims.

10. Technology is the specific application of knowledge in the various fields in the service of man. Certainly, there can be abuse of knowledge and technology. Defence technology can be abused for offensive and destructive purposes. Space technology can be diverted from one of space exploration to one of military surveillance. But this only indicate man's weaknesses rather than the wickedness of knowledge and technology.

11. The fact that a third of the world's population is Muslims and they inhabit the less developed parts of the world today shows how much Muslims are dependent on the others for their well-being. The image of the Muslims today compared to the period of excellence during and immediately after the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.) is most distressing. This is far from what Islam promises and expects of us, and

12. Today Muslims are a deprived group, generally lacking in resources and capability. Their image is not the image of a people who are strong in faith, progressive, united, tolerant and knowledgeable. No doubt the orientalist have to some extent painted a wrong picture of Islam dan Muslims, but Muslim themselves, in their orientation and conduct, have not done much to erase this tarnished image.

13. The progress of making as a whole cannot depend on a segment of the world, the so-called developed world. If the world is to achieve a better state of well-being, everyone has to play his role, Muslims irrespective. After centuries of backwardness and dependence, it is now time that Muslims improve their state of well-being and contribute to the well-being of the whole international community by acquiring knowledge and technology and use them for their betterment.

14. Although Muslims are a deprived group, there are Muslim countries which are endowed with resources. There are also Muslims with skills and expertise. What is wanting is a cooperative effort to see to the utilisation of these resources for the common good. In this age of space technology and the microchips, Muslims have a lot of catching up to do. Every minute of indifference on our part to the changing technology, may mean decades of efforts to achieve parity.

15. As Muslims we must be concerned with our way of life. But indifference and rejection cannot help in making us better Muslims. On the other hand, it will make us more dependent on and influenced by others. It is only by being involved in the quest for knowledge, and in developing the necessary technology for our benefit can we survive this age of rapid change and challenges.

16. I do not claim to be an expert on technology, but what I have seen has made me more confident that for Muslims to be an effective partner in the modern international community, and to be of service to mankind, we must strengthen our resolve to acquire the necessary knowledge and technology in keeping with the times. Much of the responsibility lies with the Muslim scholars and practitioners to instill among Muslims the right spirit and attitude that can help Muslims catch up with the others in the field of modern technology.

17. For us in Malaysia, we cannot be indifferent to the rapid technological changes around us. The resources that we are blessed with cannot be expected to last forever unless we develop our capability, technology and know-how to exploit them efficiently by ourselves, to explore new opportunities and to prepare for the future. Others will not help us forever. Others will not help when we most need help. We can only depend on ourselves. In a world that is shaped by technology, our rejection of it can only lead to continuing weakness and to possible extinction. Already some Muslims have lost faith and have rejected Islam because of our poverty in technology and the achievements that are associated with it.

18. On this note, I now declare this Conference officially open, and I wish you all success in your deliberations.

Wassalamu 'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.