

THE OPENING OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON ISLAMIC
THOUGHTS
THE ASIA-PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR

26 JULY 1984

Assalamu 'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Yang Berhormat En. Anwar Ibrahim, Menteri Pertanian merangkap Pengerusi Seminar; Yang Berhormat Dr. Sulaiman Daud, Menteri Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan; Yang Berbahagia Dr. Ismail Al-Faruqi, Pengarah International Institute of Islamic Thoughts; Dif-Dif Kehormat; Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan sekalian.

Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada penganjur, iaitu Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan, serta International Institute of Islamic Thoughts, kerana memberi peluang kepada saya untuk berucap dan seterusnya merasmikan pembukaan Seminar Pemikiran Islam Antarabangsa yang ketiga ini.

2. Umat Islam di Malaysia seharusnya berasa bangga apabila Kuala Lumpur menjadi tempat diadakan Seminar ini. Walau bagaimanapun perasaan gembira itu patut diresapi juga dengan tekad bagi mendapatkan apa-apa manfaat yang boleh dari Seminar ini. Saya berharap pihak penganjur akan cuba menyusun beberapa langkah supaya manfaat Seminar ini disebar seluas-luasnya kepada umat Islam, bukan sahaja di negara ini tetapi juga di serata dunia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. All praise to Allah Subhanahu Wataala for His blessings and salutations to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings be upon him. It is indeed an honour for me to be invited to open this Third International Seminar on Islamic Thoughts.

4. The last four centuries does us the Muslim Ummah little credit. We have not reflected the essence of Islam that was once the pace setter of humanity. Our future must reflect a new approach, we must have clearly crystallised ideas and well-articulated goals. We can only carry out orderly and constructive work when the planning is thorough and we labour towards recognised and acceptable goals. Unfortunately the vast majority of Muslims including the intellectuals and those involved in the Islamic movements have overlooked what to most builders is obvious. They know they must go somewhere but they do not know exactly where

to go. We must therefore plan for the future and this means we need to analyse the past and take stock of the present. It is clear that man's survival is dependent on new patterns of mutual partnership and cooperation, interdependence and symbiosis. This will not be possible without long-term planning for the next twenty to forty years. We also need to understand Islam within the context of the contemporary world, with the changed conditions of life. We cannot recreate the world of the early years of Islam. The changes which have occurred in recent decades are fundamentally the biggest changes human society has ever experienced, but in practical and intellectual terms, we Muslims have not been able to even conceive of how to reorganise our political, social and economic life to take in the changes that have taken place. We should reorganise our political, social and economic life in a way that fully incorporates the injunctions of Islam to ensure that a socially healthy, politically coherent and economically efficient and vigorous Ummah would emerge, able to face all challenges.

5. Consider for example the concept of shura' as applied to economics and politics. These values are laid down by the Quran and the Sunnah tells us how the Prophet formulated them, and how early Muslim society institutionalised them. The question is, how can we realise them in our life in the closing decades of the twentieth century? What is the pattern of human relationship which would best realise the values of co-operation and would lead to the most efficient system of economy? What institutional arrangements would secure a distribution of wealth and income consistent with the value of 'co-operation for the good'? Obviously it is not enough to ask the Muslims to co-operate. This request has repeatedly been made; and the end product is in front of us. Islamic injunctions must be given practical content, and its implications explained in concrete terms, before it can become operational in the economic organisation of Muslim countries. The large numbers of those involved in the process of production, the many dimensions in which co-operation must be conceived, the complex technicalities involved in production, of relevant knowledge of the actual needs of consumers, of the priorities of the State, of the intention as well as the circumstances of the other producers, and of the circumstances of the workers, all these factors have turned the simple question of how to co-operate into a highly complex one. What is required now is, if anything, a gigantic intellectual and imaginative effort involving deep insight into the objectives and scope of these injunctions. It is only by solving the problems mentioned above that we can know what co-operation is and how it can be adopted as a way of economic life in the contemporary situation. Then and then only can Islam be said to be a way of life. To retreat and withdraw from modern society is to deny that Islam is for all times.

6. Examination of other injunctions of Islam convinces us of the same conclusions. One may ask, what significance does all this have? If we are unable to understand these injunctions of Islam with reference to contemporary reality, we have failed to understand Islam itself; we fail to understand the social conduct desired of us by Allah Subhanahu Wataala if we fail to operationalise the injunctions with reference to contemporary reality, and we will not be able to plan effectively for the future.

7. This is a painful admission. And this is the root cause of the present predicament of Muslims. Not only have we failed to live up to Islam, but we have also, to a large extent, failed to appreciate its universality. It follows, therefore, that to understand the underlying dynamic relevance of the injunctions of Islam in contemporary society, and to work out the process of their implications in practice, is an acute spiritual need of the Muslim Ummah.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Our understanding of Islam will not increase overnight with the beginning of the 15th century of the Hijrah. A better future for the Muslim Ummah requires much more effort and strength. The Quran promised the eternal survival of Islam; this promise does not extend to Muslims. And Allah Subhanahu Wataala does not change the fate of a society unless they make an effort to change it themselves. History offers no support for the idea that simply by the passage of time Muslims will suddenly undergo a miraculous revival. We, the Muslim Ummah, have to make a conscious decision whether to remain in a constant state of tension, between living in the past and only superficially coming to terms with the contemporary world, or whether we will opt for an Islamic future, thereby redirecting ourselves to the original path of Islam. Remember always that Islam, when it came, was a modernising force that brought greatness to the early followers of the faith; greatness in the field of economy, industry, the sciences, the arts and military prowess.

9. For Muslim civilisation to achieve its destiny and experience a second upturn, a balanced moderate approach to Islam and a certain amount of self-criticism is a prerequisite. We Muslims must learn to be honest with ourselves. We need to have a balanced approach to this world and to the Hereafter. The concept of the Hereafter was given to man to broaden his outlook and not to make him blind to his immediate environment. We must seek good both in this world and the next. Modern scholars must therefore be neither too preoccupied with this world nor exclusively entranced by the next. Both must influence their scholarly efforts and exhortations.

10. It would appear to me that many Muslims have accepted and to some extent have taken pride in their ignorance with unbelievable satisfaction. We are in acute social, economic and political agony, yet many Muslims have adopted a strangely false sense of security: reading the Quran will bring them 'thawab' or blessings even if they do not understand or practise it, going out on tabligh or propagation will secure a piece of paradise, writing pamphlets and propaganda sheets will win support for Islam. But this preoccupation with gaining merit for self is too narrow. Muslims must establish a thriving and dynamic society as there can only be a Hereafter for us if we survive as Muslims. When Muslims have been wiped out or forcibly separated from their faith, there can be no Hereafter.

11. If we really want to establish Islam, we must look for the leading issues of our time and let people know what rights Allah has given them that they must fight for, what security Allah offers them that they must look for, and what promise Allah has for them that they must work for. We must ensure that Islam is responsive to the immediate requirements and concerns of modern man. If we ask people to accept a whole set of beliefs and practices, they may run away for they do not understand what Islam really is. This perhaps is the main problem. Understanding Islam does not only mean the capability to explain a hadith, or outline the mechanics of certain rituals or recite the verses of the Quran. Understanding Islam also means the capacity to explain and put into practice its dynamic and vibrant concepts in contemporary society.

12. At this point in time, on the one hand, disaster is threatening us and the very future of mankind is at risk. On the other hand, the existence of the Muslims as a viable force in the world is in the balance. The problems we face are complex and worrying. They are not getting any simpler. The two great challenges facing Muslims are to recreate a living civilisation of Islam that was once dynamic and thriving, and to make a positive contribution to the predicament facing mankind. In fact, these two tasks are the same because Muslim civilisation is the only civilisation that still preserves its basic teachings intact and has the potential to provide an alternative to what is called the 'modern' world. It is also the only civilisation that can provide the much-needed value structure and spiritual needs which can lead mankind to happiness on this earth. But before Muslims can do this, there is much work to be done.

13. The first thing Muslims have to do is to plan what sort of future they envisage for themselves. They can have an aimless future or a planned future. Current trends show that Muslim society is heading towards an aimless future. Unless something is done now this trend is likely to

continue, putting the Muslims in grave danger of being separated from their faith.

14. The Muslim Ummah cannot continue lying inactive like a stagnant lake -full of potential resources yet polluted. The Ummah must think about and plan for its future. Muslims have longed for freedom since they were invaded by the colonial powers and lost their independence. In some regions the struggle still continues. Although the Muslims finally achieved victory over their foreign enemies, their neglect of planning for the post-victory period robbed them of the fruits of their struggles. They sacrificed their lives for the sake of Islam, but their sacrifice was made almost in vain for the Islamic order they envisaged did not emerge. This is due to the neglect of those who failed to plan for the implementation of the Islamic system. The Muslims have spent much of their time after independence pursuing the various "isms" left behind by the colonialists.

Ladies and gentlemen,

15. There is no escape from planning for the future. If Muslims really want an Islamic social order, then they will need to examine every aspect of modern life from the perspective of Islam and make necessary corrections. The comprehensive relevance of Islam to everything has to be established on a concrete level and many questions must be researched and examined. A practical blueprint for the implementation of the Islamic system needs to be worked out taking into account the practical realities of today's world.

16. However, planning in the Muslim countries must be more than a projection into the future of today's dominant trends. It is by no means enough just to produce five-year development plans as generally these plans are responses to current situations; they remain dominated by current events. This is why most developmental planning in the Muslim countries has not been very successful because although our real problems exist on the macro level, we have concentrated our efforts on cosmetic changes for the sake of appearance. Therefore we need to make a careful cross-impact analysis between various priorities, policies and planning and various parameters of Muslim thoughts and criteria. Possible greatness in the years ahead will depend on the greatness of our vision of the future. While we may fall short of our goals, we must not allow any deficiency in the clarity and articulation of our vision.

17. Ibn Khaldun uses the word Umran for a dynamic, thriving, operational civilisation. The Muslim world today needs such a viable plan as an

alternative and to present to the Muslim Ummah convincing visions of the Muslim civilisation of the future.

18. This Third International Seminar on Islamic Thoughts should plan for reforming and moving Islamic thought forward in specific areas with a proper scale of priorities as a step towards achieving this planned future. The work plan of the International Institute of Islamic Thoughts in making critical examination of the modern disciplines in the light of the vision of Islam is an ambitious one, but is essential for the future of the Ummah. It is indeed true to say, as does the book on "Islamisation of Knowledge" published by the Institute, that today non-Muslims are the undisputed masters of all the disciplines. Muslim academicians should master all the modern disciplines, understand them completely and achieve an absolute command of all that they have to offer. This is, however, only the first prerequisite. Then they should integrate the new knowledge into the corpus of the Islamic legacy by eliminating, amending, reinterpreting and adapting its components according to the world view of Islam and its values. The exact relevance of Islam to the philosophy of the disciplines should be determined. A new way in which the reformed disciplines can serve the ideals of Islam should be adopted. Finally by their example as pioneers, they should teach the new generation of Muslims and non-Muslims how to follow in their footsteps, push the frontiers of human knowledge even further forward, discover new layers of the patterns created by Allah and establish new paths for making His will and commandments realised in history.

19. In developing such a fresh understanding of Islam, in adjusting to change, we need a number of intellectual tools. We need to develop a tradition of Muslim scholarship that combines the best techniques of traditional scholarship with those of modern methods of study and research. We need to analyse what changes are desirable in Muslim society. The confusion of some Muslim intellectuals is understandable. They have not seen the injunctions of Islam in an operational form and hence they became confused when translating these injunctions to meet the demands of modern society. Furthermore, they are trapped in the conceptual framework of the west. Fundamental questions need to be asked but unless the young Muslim intellectual is provided with university textbooks in each discipline which allow him to question present approaches, he will not be able to ask these questions. The aim of the Institute to produce textbooks in all the disciplines should be supported.

20. We must aim to develop an awareness of the future and an Islamic perception which can relate the teachings of Islam to current problems and meet the coming challenges of the future. Once we have become

sensitised to this perception, we are equipped to analyse modern problems in the light of the Quran and Sunnah. What is important is the problems we face and how to formulate practical Islamic solutions to these problems. The policies needed to solve these problems require Muslims to go against contemporary fashions to a great extent, as well as to reexamine some traditions which are seen as Islamic but are not really so. They also require a bold effort to make an Islamic stand, as well as intellectual courage and a firm understanding of Muslim societies and the culture of Islam. The future of Muslim societies is with Islam, for without Islam, they have no future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. I wish you all earnest and fruitful deliberations. Tuan-tuan dan puan-puan,

22. Dengan lafaz Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, saya dengan sukacitanya membuka Seminar Pemikiran Islam Antarabangsa yang ketiga ini dengan rasminya.

Wabillahi taufik walhidayah wassalamu 'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.