

The Official Opening Of The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) And The 2nd General Conference Of The Federation Of Universities In The Muslim World

IIUM Campus In Gombak, Selangor 17 April 2001

It is with great pleasure that I accept your kind invitation to officially open the International Islamic University Malaysia. I am delighted to have been asked to speak at this 2nd General Conference of the Federation of Muslim Universities in the Muslim World.

2. The International Islamic University of Malaysia was conceived as a seat of higher learning where the disciplines are not confined to Islamic theology but include all the sciences and the arts which are not abhorrent to Islam or incompatible with its teaching. Yet these disciplines will all be infused with the spirit and the essence of Islam as a way of life. This way the students will be able to gain mastery of all so-called non-theological subjects, which can contribute to their development and advancement and still enable them to live the way of life of true Muslims.

3. There is a great deal of confusion among Muslims regarding secularism. They tend to regard anything that is not about the ritualistic expression of Islamic faith, about Islamic laws and Islamic theology as being secular. This is rather unfortunate because it tends to make Islam a reclusive religion, incapable of understanding and dealing with anything other than what they perceive as being religious. That this should be the perception of Islam is doubly wrong because Islam is not just a faith to be believed in, but it is a way of life. Islam should therefore be concerned with everything that is done in daily life, whether as an individual or as a community. And what we do in life is not and cannot be confined to the performance of certain religious rituals and rites only.

4. As we all know Islam enjoins its followers with two separate imperatives or impositions, or injunctions. One is `Fardu Ain' which is concerned with the personal performance of the rituals and personal conduct of life as a Muslim. These earn merit for oneself for life in this world and the hereafter.

5. The other injunctions are about one's duties to oneself, to the community, to the `ummah' in general and the immediate members of the community in particular. The performance of these injunctions or `Fardu Kifayah' give merit not just to the person concerned but also to the other members of the community where the Muslim individual lives, and to the `ummah' in general.

6. While it is possible to perform `Fardu Ain' by oneself with purely religious knowledge, the performance of `Fardu Kifayah' requires other knowledge and skills. Yet `Fardu Kifayah' is no less important than `Fardu Ain' for even the most dedicated Muslims will sin if what is enjoined as `Fardu Kifayah' is not performed by him or by some other member or members of the Muslim community.

7. Even here there is a tendency to confine 'Fardu Kifayah' to the religious rituals as for example the preparation of the deceased person for burial, prayers for the dead and for the burial. It is declared that if in a community there is no one who can perform all these then the whole community is condemned for having sinned against the injunctions of Islam. And the deceased, despite his religious piety in life is said to have sinned against Islam.

8. Yet we all know that Islam enjoins upon the 'ummah', the community, to look after the well being of all Muslims and their safety. This injunction is very comprehensive because the well being and safety of the Muslim involves the provision of food, clothing and dwellings as well as arms and the capacity to defend the Muslims against aggressors and uphold the religion of Islam as the final religion of Mankind in the eyes of Allah.

9. It follows that we cannot allow Muslims to starve until they are reduced to begging for food not just from other Muslims but from non-Muslims as well, some of who are their detractors and even enemies. To keep the Muslims supplied with food they must be involved in its production, in farming, preparation and processing, transportation, wholesale and retail sale of food. To do all these they would need capital and agricultural knowledge not just to plant food crops and to harvest but also as the population and demands grows, to increase production through the development of newer and better strains with higher yields and greater resistance to diseases. Accordingly the need for scientific agriculture becomes more and more necessary. Land has to be better utilised and administered and farms must be large enough to be managed efficiently and to give the profit to be used for more investments in more food production as well as to pay tax and 'zakat' to uplift the Muslim 'ummah'. The acquisition of the knowledge and skills to do all these must certainly be a part of 'Fardu Kifayah'. The individual farmer toiling in the field with his bare hands may be adequate in the days of yore, but today's mass demands by more than one billion Muslims require new approaches to mass production.

10. The learning of agricultural science and related subjects must certainly be a duty which Muslims cannot neglect or consider as irrelevant to Islam and the Muslims. So are the other sciences which can contribute to the well-being of the Muslims, to their freedom from hegemony and oppression by their enemies. The Muslims are enjoined specifically to prepare with war-horses and weapons to put fear in the hearts of their enemies and to defend themselves. Horses and swords and bows and arrows were sufficient in the days of the Prophet. Today we need guns and tanks, fighter planes and warships and a host of other sophisticated weapons in order to deter the enemy and to defend ourselves. But we are dependent on others, including those who look upon the Muslims as their enemies, to supply us with these defence requirements. We are not putting fear in the hearts of anyone and certainly we are unable to defend ourselves effectively.

11. The result is that Muslims all over the world are oppressed, and often they are killed and massacred with impunity, expelled from their own countries to live as

refugees in hostile lands for decades and centuries even. Can we honestly say that their life is what is meant by the Islamic way of life?

12. But of course there are Muslims who excuse themselves by saying that it is Allah's will, that for the Muslims Allah has prepared heaven in after-life. Can this really be true since we have neglected a cardinal injunction of Islam to prepare ourselves with the means to strike fear in the hearts of our enemies and to defend ourselves?

13. There are some who believe that Muslims can never master the skills and knowledge to compete with their detractors in the invention, production and use of modern weapons and other products. This is a defeatist attitude unworthy of Islam. We know very well that the Muslims were superior to all others in the past in the production of weapons, other products and in their skilful usage.

14. The real reason why we are far behind the developed nations is because we are advised that our religious duty is to study religion because it will gain us merit in the next world. Indeed parents are known to insist that their children study religion because they, the parents, would gain merit for themselves also. In Malaysia professionals have been known to express regret that they had chosen to go into a profession when they should have studied religion. To expiate what they consider to be their sin they sent all their children to religious schools or to become 'hafiz'.

15. We know that many Muslims study various non- religious subjects such as science and engineering but many more who should be studying these important subjects are not doing so because even though they may be brilliant they are made to believe that these are secular subjects.

16. In addition many who are studying these non- religious subjects are being harassed by those who would have them devote more time to various para-religious activities. They are even urged to participate in activities that have nothing to do with their studies, as for example political agitations and so-called struggles over all kinds of so-called Islamic issues. Some are prevailed upon to take part in clandestine activities said to be in the interest of the religion.

17. A favourite approach of those who are opposed to the acquisition of non-religious knowledge is to accuse the Government which is promoting non-religious education of being un-Islamic. The subjects were all labeled as secular and therefore unsuitable for Muslims to study. Muslim students would feel guilty if they insist on studying these subjects and they would do their best to devote more time to religion in order not to be regarded as impious by their peers. The result is that their ability to master these subjects would be impaired.

18. In some cases such Muslim Governments are actually attacked by urban guerrillas and the leaders would be assassinated every now and again.

19. The net result of all these is a severe shortage of scientists and technocrats. In fact even trained administrators and business managers are in short supply. Today when knowledge workers are in great demand the Muslim countries are terribly short of such workers.

20. These are the reasons why there are so few Muslims in Muslim countries capable of developing their countries to the level of the developed countries of the world. There appears to be no possibility that a Muslim country would emerge as a world power in the foreseeable future, no matter how big it is.

21. The Muslim countries missed the industrial revolution completely. Now we are likely to miss the Information Age and the concomitant globalisation also. We are simply not prepared for these radical changes in technology and the relation between nations.

22. Globalisation is rapidly advancing and we are not even a part of the process of interpreting globalisation. After the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been formed all kinds of subjects totally unrelated to trade are being introduced as issues for trade negotiations between members of the WTO.

23. The IMF was once used as an agency for imposing the will of the rich countries on the poor. But its reach was limited in a way. The WTO will cover every member. Once a rule is accepted failure on the part of a member to comply can lead to countervailing measures on the part of the rich and even to trade sanctions.

24. For example if transparency in Government procurement is agreed to, the locals will have to compete with powerful international contractors who can outbid their local competition. In the end the local contractors for Government supplies or construction will all go under. On the other hand there is not a hope for the contractors from poor countries to bid for contracts put out by the Governments of the rich and powerful countries. Either way the poor businesses from the poor countries will lose.

25. Few Muslim countries are conversant with the processes of globalisation. They are all disunited in facing the challenges and the negotiations. They do not have a common stand. Some are under obligation to the rich and may not oppose the interpretations on globalisation formulated by the rich. But once they have committed themselves to the WTO, they will not be able to get out of it. In the end they will lose control over their countries. They will lose their independence.

26. This is what is in store for the third world countries and all Muslim countries belong to this category. It looks like we are going to lose out again as the world moves into the Information Age. Not only do we not have mastery of Information Technology, but also we don't seem to realise that it and the globalisation that accompanies it will again result in our subjugation.

27. Why are these things happening? Why should they happen?

28. The answer is very simple. We have forsaken the true teachings of Islam. We say Islam is a way of life when we mean it is a way of death. For we are making no effort to prepare ourselves for life in the 21st Century Masihi.

29. When Islam asks us to acquire knowledge we say that the knowledge referred to is only religious knowledge. When Islam enjoins upon us to be prepared to put fear in the hearts of our enemies and to defend ourselves, we ignore the injunction and instead, by our unpreparedness and weakness, we allow the enemy to put fear into our hearts, and to attack and overcome us at will.

30. And when Islam enjoins upon us to regard each other as brothers, we make enemies of each other, we fight and kill each other. We are told that when two Muslims fight each other, the others must try to reconcile them by referring to the teachings of the al- Quran. But we hardly try and certainly when one accepts and the other does not we never fight against him. Instead we take sides and we enlarge the differences.

31. We know that Islam forbids the taking of one's own life, forbids suicide. But when Muslims fight each other to the death, then they are actually committing suicide of the `ummah'.

32. All that is happening to the Muslims of today is due to our easy acceptance of the teachings which are selective and which exclude much that are enjoined upon us so we can make Islam as a way of life truly beneficial to the `ummah'. Instead we propagate only those parts of the religion which we, in our selfishness, want to perform for our own exclusive merit in the afterlife.

33. Western science has progressed to the point where they believe they can play God. They want to clone humans now and with their disregard for morality we cannot foretell to what evil use they will apply their knowledge. We as Muslims must never play God; we must never let the evil in us misuse and misapply science. But we have a need to understand and to be able to have the same capability. We must have this not because we want to emulate the West but because we have to know how to counter the evil that will come our way. If, and I say if, the Muslims are instilled with the proper teachings of Islam, insya-Allah, we will be able to frustrate whatever evil designs that Western scientists may have in the application of their knowledge. We cannot fight knowledge with ignorance. Of that we can be certain.

34. The Malaysian International Islamic University is not a theological university but is a university which is inspired and guided by all the teachings of Islam as a way of life, a way of life that acknowledges the inevitability of death and the hereafter. Islam enjoins that there should be a balance between the present life and the hereafter. Muslims must partake of their share in this world and seek their share in the next world.

35. Clearly today Muslims are forfeiting their share in this world. Never in the history of Islam have the Muslims been so oppressed and subjected to all kinds of indignities and forced to live a life that is so penurious and miserable. Everywhere they are forced to depend on others for their survival even, and for this they have to pay a heavy price. They have to submit to all kinds of restrictions on their freedom, on their rights as members of the human race. In short they are anything but the 'khalifah' on earth that they have a right to be.

36. As I said, there are some among us who would have us believe that this is Islam, that we will suffer in this world because we will reside in heaven in the next. There are those who believe that this is 'takdir' the fate that God has determined for us. They believe that we must not go against what has been pre-ordained by Allah. But if we try to improve our lot and if as a result we succeed, that too would be 'takdir', for certainly we cannot succeed if it had not been pre-ordained by Allah.

37. We must all know our religion so we may not deviate from it. But it is not necessary that every single one of us to be an expert in Islam, an 'ulama'. There must be enough of us who master other skills that are necessary to fulfil the other injunctions of Islam. The General, skilled in the art and science of modern warfare, is no less important to the Muslim 'ummah' and to Islam than the man learned in Islamic theology. The skilled administrators, doctors, engineers, scientists, businessmen and industrialists etc are no less important to the Muslim 'ummah' than the learned theologian.

38. There must be a division of labour among the Muslims for there cannot be a Muslim 'ummah' where everyone is skilled in everything. It is impossible for a Muslim theologian to design and build a fighter aircraft, produce it and fly it himself to defend the Muslim 'ummah'. These must be the responsibility of those trained in these fields. The theologians must never assume that because they are well versed in religion, they can do everything that those who are trained in the various fields can do. Nor should those with other expertise, though they must know the fundamentals of Islam so as not to stray away from it, indulge in the intricacies of Islam which are the subject of polemics between the 'ulamas'.

39. It is only when we accept that there is no one competent in all fields and we acknowledge that everyone has an important role to play in the life of Muslims and their society and nation and that each of these roles are as much an 'ibadat' or duty enjoined by Islam and would therefore gain merit, can the Muslims and their countries expect to develop and be at par with the developed nations of the world.

40. This International Islamic University of Malaysia must therefore dedicate itself not just to Muslim theology but to preparing Muslims in all fields of learning so as to enable them to build a Muslim 'ummah' that is well versed in the fundamentals of Islam and in the skills and knowledge to make them capable of developing their societies and countries to compete in a world so hostile to Islam. We should seek to restore the Muslim 'ummah' and Islam to their rightful places as Allah's 'khalifah'

on earth, to bring back not just the greatness of Islam but the sanity of the rest of the world also. We believe that this is what Islam really wants us to do.

41. I now have the pleasure, in the name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful, to declare open the Second General Conference of the Federation of Universities in the Muslim World and the official opening of the International Islamic University Malaysia.