

**The 31st International Conference Of International Federation
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"THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE NEW ERA"

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organiser, the Bahrain Society for Training and Development, for giving me the honour to address the distinguished delegates and participants to the 31st International Federation of Training and Development Organisations (IFTDO) World Conference and Exhibition.

2. We are observing increasing hype about the significance of knowledge in an era characterised by high levels of uncertainty and inability to predict the future. Knowledge is of course the source of power for promoting self and for influencing others. As such, the more knowledgeable you are the greater is your power to influence others, or even other nations. While other sources of power such as legitimate power, connection power, representative power and coercion power can be removed from you, nobody can take away the power based on your knowledge once it is ingrained in us. Thus, with this distinctive attribute that is far superior to any other sources of power, knowledge contributes to the ultimate underpinning for success.

3. The history of the world has witnessed the superiority of knowledge to bring power to the earlier civilisations. Knowledge obviously plays a prominent role in the establishment of powerful civilisations. The people poor in knowledge were invariably subjugated by the civilised knowledgeable people. This is still true today. The greatest powers dominating the world are the nations with the greatest amount of knowledge at their command.

4. Knowledge is somehow transmitted through the generations. The children of knowledgeable people seem to inherit the knowledge of their forebears and to be more clever than their parents as they grow older. But beyond this natural transmission the capacity to store knowledge was developed by the relatively advanced people. This takes the forms of writings using various symbols and then on to the development of the alphabets which spells out the sound of words, thus reducing the need for having thousands of characters as with Chinese writing. Thus in Arabic we have 28 alphabets while in English 26 alphabets can be combined in various order to spell words which can be written and permanently store the knowledge that has been acquired. The total sum of knowledge

increased tremendously through using alphabetical symbols rather than memory and picture characters.

5. Clearly the smaller the number of symbols the greater is the amount of knowledge which can be stored and transmitted currently or in the future. But now we come to the smallest number of symbols and the amount of knowledge stored and transmitted has multiplied by thousands of times as a result.

6. Today we use the binary system consisting of just 0 and 1 and we know that this digital system has made transmission of knowledge not only easier but more accurate. Thus digital recording of a coloured picture can be preserved indefinitely, will never fade, and will never deteriorate. The digital combination, which spells out the data including colour will not change over time. And so more knowledge can be stored, recalled, transmitted and updated without any loss of clarity or any distortion.

7. It would seem that symbols, which are less complex, smaller in number are more powerful than the huge multiplicity of symbols that the old civilisations invented. In their time they were more knowledgeable because of the ability to record knowledge and transmit it between themselves and between generations. But today because of the application of binary symbols the old advanced civilisation seems primitive. Digital technology based on binary numbers seems to be the ultimate in transmission of knowledge across space and time.

8. Symbols and words are merely means of communicating ideas and the subjects involved. Nevertheless they were venerated and the scribes who inscribed them and those who record knowledge on stone or on leaves and parchment were looked up to as learned people with mysterious powers. These people even locked up their knowledge in the books they produced. But more important than the actual records are the knowledge that are contained in the writings. The records are important only if the knowledge in them can be deciphered. The more people there are who can decipher the records the more knowledgeable and advanced will be the society and the civilisation. But once the ability to decipher is lost the civilisation would regress.

9. The Egyptian hieroglyphics and many other systems of writings have been largely lost and we know that these civilisations had withered and disappeared together with their knowledge. The people became primitive. Sometimes the loss is due to misguided people fearing the knowledge, or suspicions of the knowledgeable people and the mystery which surrounded them. The illiterate feared the power of the

learned and in many instances these people were killed. Acquisition of the skills to read was made unlawful on pain of death. And so great civilisations would disappear as those with brute strength but lacking in knowledge rid themselves of the usually frail learned people from among them. In recent times there is at least one country which massacred the learned people in their midst because they feared the knowledge that these people possessed. Fortunately the killing of these people was not complete and many remain to revive the knowledge and culture of the people.

10. Knowledge is obviously important to the progress of a civilisation. When Islam was embraced by the Jahilliah Arabs and learning was encouraged a great civilisation which was to last 1300 years was started. The Kitab, the Al-Quran, which the Prophet brought, contained a complete guidance for life and death. One of the most significant guides in the Quran was regarding the acquisition of knowledge.

11. In Surah Al-Baqarah Verse 164 the believers are enjoined to observe Allah's creation, the sky and the earth, the rain which falls bringing water for us to drink and making the land fertile stimulating the growth of plants. The bountiful growth because of the rain provided food for the animals, which in turn serve as sources of food, and for our transportation.

12. The exhortation by Allah in the Al-Quran to observe all these cannot be in order to glory in Allah's power only but it must also be because the observation will add to the knowledge of Man about Allah's creations and how they can contribute towards the well being of Men. Thus from the observation of what some would call natural phenomena came the knowledge of agriculture. Instead of just waiting for grass to grow and animals to eat, the intelligent observers soon deliberately plant and grew the grass and the fruit trees, gathered herds of cattle, horses and camels and so provide food and sustenance and the transportation for the community of Men.

13. From that simple beginning we have today the great agricultural industry based on the knowledge from observing Allah's creations in ever-greater minuteness and with this knowledge improve the productivity of agriculture so to feed the 6 billion people of this earth. Without the knowledge gained from the observation of Allah's creations that the Al-Quran enjoins us to do there is no way we can feed the billions of peoples of the earth today. And those who do not observe and apply the knowledge from their observation are condemned to poverty, backwardness and even starvation and death.

14. The early Muslims obeyed this injunction of Allah and studied and observed their surrounding. They also learned to decipher the knowledge contained in the writings of other people in the past, the work of the Greeks and the Persians and the Chinese. This knowledge enabled them to understand better the things they observe by themselves. From the knowledge they acquired they, these early Muslim scholars or ulama, were able to contribute new knowledge and cause the Islamic civilisation to expand and to prosper, to testify to the greatness of Islam. It was these Muslims who created such new learnings as Algebra, Astronomy, Algorithm; invented the astrolabe to guide ships in the vast ocean out of sight of any landmarks, to understand metallurgy and so produce the Damascene steel, the sharpest and most durable sword and a host of other new products. These knowledge made the Islamic world the centre of learning, the great civilisation which gave Islam and the Muslims an honourable place in the world.

15. The Europeans and others flocked to Muslim centres of learning in order to access the knowledge of the Muslim scholars. The European Renaissance or Rebirth would not have been possible without the accumulation of knowledge by the Muslims, without their great libraries in Cordoba, Baghdad, Cairo and elsewhere. The present European progress is due to the knowledge they gained from the Muslims, knowledge which they expanded and deepened in order to counter the dominance of the Muslim civilisation.

16. Then the period of fear of knowledge descended on the Muslim world. The injunction to seek knowledge was interpreted as seeking religious knowledge only. Other kinds of knowledge not related to religious law in particular, to the creed and practice of Islam were not only discouraged but were actually prohibited. The knowledge obtained from the old non-Muslim civilisation were proscribed and regarded as haram even.

17. Because of the fear of being labelled kafir or infidels, the Muslim intellectuals avoided knowledge other than that of religion. The great Muslim mathematicians, scientists, geographers and navigators were no longer revered but were ignored. No new knowledge was pioneered and non-religious knowledge became so alien to the Muslims that the great Muslim scholars were actually lost to the non-Muslim world, lost principally to the Europeans. Thus Ibnu Sina became Avicenna; Ibni Rusdi became Averroes etc. Al Khwarizmi who invented the Algorithm was ignored by the latter day Muslims and yet without the mathematics based on Algorithm modern computers and the programming of the microchip would not be possible.

18. Because of the narrow interpretation of what constitutes knowledge in Islam, the Muslims became more and more ignorant with the passage of time. Their knowledge of the creations of Allah decreased to the point where they became unable to apply these gifts of Allah to mankind for the good of the Muslims. We did not participate in the development of scientific and technological knowledge, which led to the great industrial revolution. We not only missed the industrial revolution but attempts were made to reject the products of the industrial revolution. We condemned the use of the printing machine, an instrument for the better recording of knowledge and its spread, for a very long time. The Turkish Government which acquired one printing machine was forced not to use it and for a long time it was hidden away.

19. Electricity were rejected as being against Islam and mosques in particular were not allowed to use electricity to light up. Indeed one Islamic state banned electricity completely and continued to use oil lamps and candles until about 30 years ago only. In Malaysia in the 60's TV sets were thrown into the river because of someone's fatwa that moving pictures were haram. That we have been watching the movies since the 1930's did not seem to affect the thinking of these people. Motorised vehicles were not allowed for funerals as they were considered unIslamic, the products of the infidels.

20. Today we are broader minded and prepared to use practically all the products of the so-called infidels. But we are the users only, not the producers and certainly not the inventors of these products. We are unable to invent or to produce because we lack the knowledge. We are told that such knowledge is secular and the only knowledge that we need to acquire is knowledge that are directly concerned with the religion of Islam.

21. But is it true that knowledge that is apparently not religious is secular and its acquisition is prohibited or discouraged by Islam?

22. We remember the well known hadiths of the Prophet, peace be upon him, to seek knowledge even in China. What was the knowledge available in China at the time of the Prophet? Certainly there could not be more knowledge about Islam than there was in the birthplace of Islam, in Mekah and Madinah and in Arabia. The knowledge that could be acquired in China would be non-religious knowledge. At that time China was already advanced in papermaking, ceramics, explosives, the art of administration and of war etc. Clearly Islam wants the Muslims also to learn subjects which are not specifically

linked with religion even if the source of knowledge is not Muslim.

23. And the Al-Quran stresses the need for Muslims to be always prepared to defend themselves and the religion. At the time of the Prophet, defence involved possessing warhorses, swords, bows and arrows and lances. Many Muslim teachers stress these ancient weapons rather than the need to defend the ummah effectively.

24. In our times we need guns, rockets, tanks, fighter planes and warships. We can buy these but we will always be held to ransom by the people who make these things. To defend the ummah we must not just be able to produce these defence equipment but we should be able to invent, design and produce new ones. How can we do this if we are not knowledgeable in physics, chemistry, design and production technology and a host of other subjects?

25. Ever since the demise of the Ottoman Empire we have not been able to defend ourselves. Look at what is happening to Palestine. We are constantly begging the world to stop the carnage. We know we are weak and unable to defend the ummah, defend Islam even. There is not a single Muslim nation among the developed nation. We are all developing nations dependent on the charity of non-Muslims. Is this what Islam wants us to be?

26. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Russia, in South Asia, in Africa Muslims are unable to protect themselves. It is sad but while we can blame the aggressors we cannot claim that we are free from blame. Our religion enjoins upon us to prepare to defend ourselves but by rejecting the knowledge needed to be able to obey the injunctions of Allah s.w.t. we are incapable of defending ourselves. We are also to be blamed. I would go further and say that we have sinned. We may carry out all the other ibadah but we would still have to pay for our sins, in this world and the next.

27. Today we are being dragged literally screaming into a new world, a world of Information and Technology, a world that is fast globalising, a world where national borders are no more the barrier for our national integrity, for our defence. Guns and tanks, airplanes and warships cannot stop information from crossing our borders. But knowledge can. 28. We have a grave need to master the new knowledge about science and technology, to pioneer this knowledge even, to be at the cutting edge. It is not enough for us to learn from the knowledge pioneered by others, but like the great Muslim scientists and mathematicians of the past, we must improve and add to the knowledge that is available. It is only when

we are ahead in knowledge that we will be able to defend ourselves.

29. Muslims are inclined to think that catching up and surpassing the people who are ahead of us now is not possible. This is a defeatist attitude unworthy of the followers of the greatest religion, the chosen of Allah, the Khalifahs on earth. We have the capacity and the talents. We can do what the others can do if we realign and apply our intellect. We need not be irreligious, atheistic or hedonistic. We can keep our faith. But we must balance between the exigencies of this world and the akhirat. Indeed in every prayer we ask that we be given "Hassanah" in this world and in the hereafter, not just in the hereafter.

30. We need not miss any of the compulsory ibadah when we are pursuing the knowledge of science and technology. There must be from among us those who specialise in the study of religion in great depth so that religious knowledge remains with us. But we have to allocate our manpower more wisely; we have to have more people pursuing essential worldly knowledge so that we may not be ignorant, left behind and hegemonised by others.

31. The process of acquiring new knowledge is not going to be easy, and certainly it is going to take time. But Allah has enjoined upon us to be patient. Innallaha maassabirin. We have to be patient but Insyallah we will be able to catch up. Even if it takes us a century or more we have to do this, we have to pursue knowledge in every field, we have to take the first move. The Prophet did not convert all to Islam on the first day.

32. Knowledge is power. It is not only in the new era that knowledge means power. Knowledge means power since the dawn of human civilisation. The brave and powerful savage has always to submit to the will of the civilised men, the men with knowledge. In modern times it is not always that the strongest army or the most powerful country, which triumphs. The knowledgeable strategist skilled in deploying and directing his forces can quite often defeat this brute strength of a powerful enemy. But he must have the forces at his disposal.

33. Today knowledge is even more powerful. Knowledge cannot be confined to one field only. In a community there must be division of labour where mastery of knowledge is concerned. As much as there must be those learned in the religion there must be in every field of modern knowledge a sufficient number learned in the multitude of other subjects which a society wishing to survive and to avoid domination needs.

34. Knowledge can be dangerous when wrongly applied but simply because of the need to avoid this possibility should not lead us to stop the search and acquisition of knowledge. Certainly if we as Muslims curb the quest for knowledge we will be the losers because others will carry on the quest anyway and they may apply their knowledge against us.

35. In all kinds of work today we no longer depend on the skills of manual workers, or craftsmen. The marvellous electronic products that we use today, the automobiles and aircrafts, are not built by craftsmen. They are built by average workers using the machines designed and built by knowledgeable engineers and scientists.

36. But for the Information age we need knowledge workers more than ever before. In the IT and Multimedia Industry knowledge workers will outnumber the skilled workers more and more. They will produce the software, the contents and the processors, which will then be used to program the automated machines and robots to do all the tedious repetitive work. Artificial intelligence can only be used if there are intelligent people, knowledgeable people inventing, progressing and updating the algorithm and the logic all the time.

37. Knowledge is power more than ever before. We ignore the need to seek, acquire and improve and our mastery of knowledge at our own risk, at our own peril. What happens to the Palestinians today may well happen to all of us. Thank You.