

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY H E TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD  
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**“HUMAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURES FROM DIALOGUE TO ALLIANCE”**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A civilization is said to exist when a large human community develops a complex culture of high values, laws and systems governing the community with this culture the community would physically and intellectually progress. On the other hand human societies would be regarded as primitive and uncivilized when it fails to develop systems of administration and beliefs in high values. Such societies would remain undeveloped and backward.

Human civilization is dependent on the quality of the culture i.e. the value system that it develops. If the value system is conducive to progress and development then a good civilization would result. Conversely if the value system does not encourage changes towards what may be recognized as improvement in the quality of life, then it will not become a good civilization and it may even regress and be displaced by other more assertive civilizations.

Civilization and culture are closely linked to each other. A good quality of culture would create a good civilization. And a good civilization would attempt to sustain or improve its culture. Each feeds on the other and so both would grow.

Culture here refers mainly to the value system, i.e. the understanding of justice, fairness, the difference between good and bad, discipline, willingness to submit to what constitutes authority, the laws and regulations and the traditions of the community. There are finer points to all these as interpreted by different civilizations. For example some civilization would regard the female as inferior, created merely to serve the males. But another might consider the protection of females a measure of the high breeding of the males. Then again there would be societies which uphold the equality of the sexes. But all these can achieve the status of civilized societies.

Throughout human history the strong and the powerful usually abuse their might even as they bring a kind of order to what could be an anarchic society. But off and on the mighty and the strong who ruled may also be imbued with inherent wisdom and would seek to refine values so that the community's quality of life improves. Hammurabi for example gave laws to the people he ruled. And this came from an ability to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, what is fair and what is unjust for the members of the society. Then there were the prophets who would spread high values through religions, which would bring about a more orderly and secure society capable of progressing and of giving the community a good quality of life.

But almost invariably great civilizations brought about by high cultural values would fail over time. And they fail because the cultural values kept on being interpreted and reinterpreted so that they eventually differ so much from the original good values introduced by kings and prophets that they could no longer sustain the civilization which they had created, much less improve it. It is not the values per se which fail to deliver

and sustain a civilization, rather, it is inherent human weaknesses which distort the values and in the end undermine the progress towards civilisational greatness.

It would perhaps be easier if we take the examples of a few civilizations. The Christian civilization was the result of the teachings of Christ and his apostles. Apart from belief in god and the afterlife, the Christian religion also teaches good values and the rejection of what is bad. When the Christians were being thrown to the lions, they were taught that this was bad but they must bear up with this oppression.

But once the Christians of Europe became the majority they behaved exactly like their former roman tormentors – they persecuted those who fail to accept their religion, or more correctly their interpretation of their religion. The very priests, who taught about Christian charity, taught and legitimized Christian oppression of non-Christians.

Thus, they would not only periodically massacre the Jews but after the split between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, they would persecute and even burn at the stakes as heretics those who refused to accept each one's interpretation. Jesus Christ who led a minority dissenting Hebrew sect did not teach his followers to periodically massacre the other Jews or heretics. The Spanish inquisitors and others made intolerance a part of the teachings of Christianity knowing full well that it was not a part of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

It is the same with Islam. There was only one Islam which was brought by the prophet. Certain differences in the interpretation of Islam have always been permitted. But often the differences are such that the Muslims are split into sects and hundreds of different groups. These sects each claims only they are the true believers, the real Muslims. Such is their faith in their own interpretations that they are ready to fight and kill each other.

The original values and culture as taught by the prophet of Islam in very important areas have been forgotten. Thus despite the teachings that all Muslim are brothers, each sect would not accept members of the other sects as brother-Muslims. That they all bear witness to the oneness of Allah and that Mohammad is his messenger is not enough for making them brothers of each other. Other qualifications have been added and must be believed in and adhered to before their Muslim credentials are acknowledged.

Apart from religion, ideologies also influence the culture of people and the development of their civilizations. Certain modern ideologies place a premium on the idea that equality results in justice and fairness. In the effort to create an egalitarian society, socialist and communist ideologies were conceived. Opposed to these ideologies were the capitalists who believe that each individual has a right to be rewarded according to his ability.

Egalitarianism must seem to be the most just and the fairest condition which should prevail in human society. But in pursuit of egalitarianism those who were better-off had to be dispossessed and even killed. In other words inequality of treatment had to be employed in order to achieve equality. If egalitarianism is such an important article of faith then inequality of treatment should never be employed even for achieving equality. Then egalitarianism came up against human nature. The skilled and the capable would not put in what would be more work than the others if they are not going to be recognised and rewarded. Nor would anyone shoulder more responsibility if he carries no extra authority and is not amply rewarded.

Even the effort to achieve equality would require inequality of power and responsibility. The leaders of socialist and communist countries actually enjoy more power than most non-egalitarian countries. They have actually become absolute dictators. Clearly absolute equality between all members of a society is impossible. People who have to do more or contribute more must be rewarded more than those who contribute less. Eventually socialism and communism based on egalitarianism were abandoned. They were found to be not only unachievable but actually brought about the opposite results. They reduce productivity and impoverished the society. Civilizations based on absolute egalitarianism must fail and regress. A more realistic and practical form of egalitarianism had been evolving in the meantime. Democracy confers equal rights in certain activities only. The most important are the rights to vote and choose governments and equality before the law.

Limited to these two items, democracy would probably work. But then, other rights are added e.g. rights to free speech and a free press, rights of individuals to do what he feels like doing, animal rights etc. Free speech and free press cannot be absolutely free simply because they can cause conflict, serious conflict and even civil war, within the community. They can also subvert the moral values of the society. A society that permits everything to be done in the name of human rights must become permissive, so that the basest human desires must be catered to and displayed to the detriment of society. Indeed the exercise of the rights by an individual or a group would deprive others of their rights.

We see today total collapse of morality in the disregard for the institutions of marriage and family, unashamed admissions of being bastards, open homosexuality to the point where priests claim a right to practice it while professing to believe in Christianity. Thus the democratic ideology and accompanying freedoms have led to a culture of immorality and permissiveness. Without doubt this permissive culture will finally lead to a collapse of the democratic civilization. Democracy has also led to the tolerance of unlimited greed. The capitalism which is an off-shoot of present day democracy now recognizes no curb to the acquisition of unlimited wealth. Today individuals can become more wealthy than sovereign states. And the methods by which these individuals acquire wealth are no longer subjected to rules or regulations.

Thus currency traders were allowed to bankrupt whole nations and throw millions of people out of work so the traders can make unlimited profits for themselves. Where before business monopolies were disallowed, and anti-trust laws were enacted to prevent monopolies, now they blatantly merge and acquire, destroy all their competitors in order to monopoly not just in a country but in the whole world. A culture of disdain for the welfare of others has replaced a culture of caring. Every possible means to weaken the weak and strengthen the rich and the strong have now become a part of the world's culture and now characterizes modern world civilization. Good has become bad and bad is good. Greed is claimed to be great.

While the democrats talk about the virtues of democracy, like the equal rights before the law and voting, fanatics among them are not averse to employing undemocratic ways in order to promote democracy. They would tell lies and use their military power to impose democracy on others. That this just will not work does not seem to bother them. That their ultimate objective is not democracy but the acquisition of wealth also does not embarrass them. They will brag about their good intentions even as they deprive others of their basic rights, the rights to life itself.

Religions and ideologies are all noble. But human beings invariably distort and corrupt them. And as a result they fail to bring about the good cultures and civilisations they were meant to create. There is now supposed to be a clash of civilizations. Apparently the civilisations that are referred to be the ones based on religions specifically that based on the Judeo-Christian religion and the Muslim religion.

Can this clash be mitigated, diminished or prevented through dialogue. They can if the clash is due to civilisations based on religions being different. But they are not. At least it was not religious differences between Muslims and Jews or Christians which led to present conflicts. It was territorial. It was the seizure of Muslim land. The Christians and the Jews are in denial, refusing to acknowledge that the seizure of the land of the Palestinian Arabs is what caused the present conflict. If other Muslims side with the Arab Muslims, it is because the injustice is perpetrated against a people who are similar with them. The Christians side with the Jews because the creation of the state of Israel was in the interest of the European Christians. It was not because they feel an affinity for Judaism or their religions are alike.

In fact historically the European Christians had always felt antagonistic towards the Jews. Throughout history they had massacred Jews in regular pogroms. When the Spanish Catholics reconquered Spain they forced the Jews to convert to Christianity or be expelled or put to death. In Muslim Spain the Jews and the Christians were allowed to retain their religions. The Jews expelled by Christians invariably found refuge in Muslim countries.

If today Christians are less fanatical and inclined to be more tolerant, of the Jews, it is not because of religion. The European Christians have largely forsaken Christianity and adopted values which are based on a secular creed. The clash that we see today is thus a clash between people who had lost their land against the people who had seized and expropriated this land. It so happened that the seizure is by Christian Europeans in order to solve their Jewish problem and the loss of land happen to belong to a part of the Muslim world.

If there is a dialogue between the Muslims, Christians and Jews and the result is greater understanding of each other, this would be good. The misunderstanding among the followers of these three religions is most likely due to lack of knowledge of each others beliefs. But better understanding is unlikely to resolve a conflict caused by territorial problems. After all Christian Europeans have always fought each other because of territory, their common religion notwithstanding.

Because the Europeans refuse to acknowledge that the conflict is territorial, but instead insist that it is not only religious but also ideological, the conflict has been aggravated and widened. The Europeans have convinced themselves that it was the lack of democracy which has made Muslim countries oppose the creation of Israel and the support Israel received from the Europeans democrats. Based on this assumption the Europeans now want to democratize the Muslim countries. Just as the communists had used force and liquidated those who stood in their way, the European democrats are now invading Muslim countries and killing Muslims in order to make them democratic. Their approach is not going to endear democracy to the Muslims and their countries.

But democracy is not the great thing that it is made out to be. Even basic democracy, i.e. confined merely to the elections of governments will not guarantee good

government. It is entirely possible for the majority of the people to choose a bad or biased government in a multi-ethnic, multi-ideological, or multi-religions country. It is also possible for the rich to corrupt the voters or to make elections so expensive that only the rich can hope to lead governments. The voters themselves can force the candidates to do what is not right, to abuse power and misuse government funds simply by threats to withdraw support.

And it is important to remember that democratic countries can be very belligerent, willing to go to war and to invade and kill in pursuit of national objectives. The only country which has dropped atom bombs killing nearly 200,000 innocent people is a democratic country. Democrats are no kinder or more human than dictators. The present attempt to democratise Muslim countries will not resolve the conflicts and will probably create distaste for the system.

So is there no role for a dialogue between civilizations? There is. But it must be about justice, particularly justice in the relations between peoples of different faiths and ideologies, justice in the relations between countries. The problem faced by the world today is caused by double standards. The powerful believe they can do what others are not allowed to do. They would not even allow the weak to have the capacity to defend themselves. Now they have abrogated to themselves the right to change the governments of other countries by force of arms if they so wish. But the other countries may not do the same to them. The right to terrorize and deprive people of food and medicine is to be their exclusive rights but any attempt to retaliate in kind would be condemned as being wrong.

It is the same in trade and commerce. Countries are being forced to open up but non-tariff barriers are used to keep the powerful countries closed. The concept of intellectual property is conceived to protect the rich and the powerful but the brains of the people in the poor countries may be enticed to the rich countries without any payment whatsoever.

the world had tried to solve conflicts through wars. But wars cannot put an end to wars. They only lead to more wars. Then came the idea of an international organisation to bring conflicts to the negotiation tables. The League of Nations and the United Nations were created for this purpose. But the powerful countries have refused to surrender their sovereignty. They reserve the right to use force, to go to war, to kill and to destroy.

The forum for dialogue and alliances have already been created but concepts about law and order within nations, the equality between the citizens before the law have not been accepted for the relations between nations. Alliances can be formed but they will not necessarily result in something good. The coalition of the willing that we see today is an alliance for the oppression of others, for the abuse of the rights of others. An alliance will not necessarily bring about a good civilization. There is basically no difference between the "coalition of the willing" and the "axis of evil" if you are on the wrong end.

Conflicts between nations there will always be. But what is important is that the conflicts should not result in war, in killing people and destroying countries in order to resolve conflicts. Whatever means that are resorted to, it should not include war. Indeed war should be made an international crime. Since time immemorial the human race has accepted war as justifiable, as being legal and not criminal. Yet war means killing people and killing people is criminal. How does one reconcile killing people in wars as being not criminal when everyone admits that killing people is criminal?

The truth is killing people in war or in peace is criminal for they involve the same termination of human life. In fact war is worse for the people killed have committed no crime, have not quarreled or done harm to the killers. If in this 21st century we want to claim that we are civilized then our culture, the culture of all the people in the world must include the sanctity of human life whether in peace or in times of conflicts. In other words any dialogue between opposing groups must be centered on making war, i.e. the killing of people in pursuit of national objectives, illegal. War must be criminalizing.

Will this be possible? It will be if we ensure that only pacifists are elected to lead countries. People do not want to kill or be killed. It would be possible to increase the number of pacifists especially in the democratic world so that they will ensure that only anti war people would be elected. But the need to use force of arms to deal with warlike recalcitrant nations may arise. For this possibility there must be an international force ready to stop such nations. And gradually the production of arms and development of weapons must be reduced. If we succeed in this then we can consider ourselves, the human race as having developed a new culture and attained true civilization. In a shrinking globalized world the need for a single culture and civilisation has become urgent. The alternative is a war, probably nuclear which would destroy civilisation completely. There would be no more conflict but there would be no civilisation either.

Human civilisations evolve because of the original cultures. If the cultures are reinterpreted or new definitions added to, they may not be able to deliver the civilisation that was originally promised. But of course the new interpretations may actually improve the civilization. Whether it is one or the other depends on the quality of the people involved. But when the culture becomes distorted due to new interpretation and additions and the expectations become greater then they would fail to deliver even the original limited objectives, the simple civilization.

We are witnessing this happening before our eyes. The high values and cultures that evolve from the trust in the goodness of the majority has now promoted just the opposite values and culture. Today democrats are totally intolerant of non democrats and they have actually begun killing the non-democrats so they would convert to democracy. In history the Christians who achieved power quickly forgot their sufferings and martyrdom and of giving of the other cheek and they would burn to death those who they decided were not Christians. Now democrats cannot wait for the slow acceptance of democracy by the majority. Democrats now want to force regime change so that democracy is accepted. And thousand will die with no certainty that there would be democracy.

If it is possible, there should be a return to basics, to the simple beginning of the cultural values. At the very least some of the later additions and interpretation should be weeded out so that only those close to the original culture remains. If this is done then the cultures and civilisations would find many common values and common grounds. And when these are discovered dialogue would be possible. And following that there would be greater understanding and alliance could result.