

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD,
CHAIRMAN OF THE IDB 1440H VISION COMMISSION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCHING OF THE IDB 1440H VISION
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA ON 23 MARCH 2006**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and a very good morning.

Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi,
the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia;

H E Dr Ahmad Mohamed Ali,
the President of the IDB group;

Distinguished members of the IDB 1440 Hijrah vision commission;

Your Excellencies members of the diplomatic corps;

Honorable ministers of the government of Malaysia;

Brothers and sisters;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Allow me at the outset to thank the IDB Board of Governors and IDB Management for their thoughtfulness and concern in initiating this exercise to develop a vision of the future for the ummah and the role IDB should play to realize it. I am deeply honoured to be given the privilege of chairing the IDB 1440 Hijrah Vision Commission, which was tasked with developing the vision. I am sure that we are all aware that while we can plan, it is Allah s.w.t. who will determine what will happen to our plans. When the prophet s.a.w. decided to migrate to Medina, it was because he wanted to save Islam and to fulfill his mission. Because of his migration, Islam is now the religion of 1.5 billion people. In planning this vision, we are following in his footsteps. In other words we are following his "sunnah" as taught by Islam. May Allah help us.

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters,

2. This development of a vision for the Muslims is indeed an urgent and essential exercise in the face of the deterioration of the Muslim world and the weakened situation of the ummah that we see today. The commission members and eminent Muslim thinkers, scholars, corporate leaders and technocrats are aware of the seriousness of the task that is required of them and they have spared no effort in developing the vision and indicating the ways to achieve it.

3. On behalf of the commission, I would like to thank the institute of strategic and international studies Malaysia, the vision partners and the IDB vision technical expert team for their many contributions to ensure vision 1440 Hijrah is clearly defined and the actions that the IDB and others must take in order to realise it.

4. I would also like to record our gratitude to the governments of Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, the republics of Kazakhstan and Burkina Faso for their cooperation and contribution towards the work of the four regional workshops held last year.

5. Within the given time frame of one year, the commission held three meetings of the vision commission, supplemented by four regional workshops that enabled critical inputs of the stakeholders not in the commission towards shaping the vision. I am pleased to announce that we have been able to come up with a full report of the commission's work and recommendations for the consideration of the IDB board of governors and the member countries of the IDB and the OIC. I do hope all will lend support to the proposals in the report and to the implementation of these proposals. Without their approval and support no vision will ever be realised.

6. This is the first time that the Islamic Development Bank or IDB, and concerned Muslims have come up with a definitive description of the Islamic vision of development. This vision remains anchored to the teachings of Islam as a way of life, while taking into consideration the vastly different environment that Muslims have to live in today. We believe that development and worldly well-being are not incompatible with Islam. After all it was Islam which transformed the ignorant feuding jahilliah Arabs into the founders of the great Islamic civilisation and shaped much of the way of life of the Muslims to this day.

7. But we cannot be proud of the decline of that civilisation and the sad state of the muslims today. Nor can we believe that this is what Islam would lead us to when we follow its teachings. We know that islam promises hassanah or the good life in this world and in the next for those who accept the faith and the teachings and practice them. If we do not enjoy *hassanah* in the world of today it cannot be because of Islamic teachings. It must be because we are not practicing the injunctions of our religion or that we have misinterpreted them. The fault lies with us and it is incumbent upon us to identify what we do which is wrong and to correct them.

8. The Islamic world today is full of paradoxes and contradictions. In spite of a number of Muslim nations being extremely wealthy, there is not a single one of them that can be classified as developed by any criteria. Certainly there is no Muslim world power as there was for much of the past 1,300 years. Almost all are lagging behind in modern knowledge, financial and technological skills and, in many instances, effective government. In addition poverty, ignorance and instability have become such common features in the Muslim world that our detractors assume that these are the natural consequences of following the teachings of Islam.

9. It is, therefore, not surprising that today the world associates Islam with backwardness. This angers us Muslims. But the fact is that we are backward. We are almost totally dependent upon others for almost all our needs in life. Even in the extraction of the wealth and resources that Allah has blessed us with, we depend on others. the whole Muslim ummah of 1.5 billion is one huge consumer society, procuring all our needs from outside our community, including our defense and security requirements. We produce practically nothing on our own, we can do almost nothing for

ourselves, we cannot even manage our wealth. We hire other people to do everything for us. When doing this we seem not to have faith in Muslim ability or qualifications.

10. That Muslims were at one time the most advanced people in all fields of human endeavour is a historical fact. At the time when the European Christians were wallowing in the dark ages and the Jews were wandering rootless all over the world, the Muslim ummah were the biggest traders, the producers of goods, the strategists, navigators and redoubtable defenders of the faith. They were also the most learned, the most enlightened and the most liberal of the people in the world. Christians and Jews lived freely under Muslim rule. Everywhere, impressed by the teachings of Islam, and the worldly behaviour and success of Muslims, people of all races embraced the religion so that much of the world became Muslim. From Spain to China, from Tatarstan in the north to Southeast Asia, Muslim people and Muslim countries thrived and prospered. Muslims were respected and no one dared to desecrate the Quran or insult the prophet and his teachings.

11. Then, the great Islamic civilisation went into decline. With hindsight, we could pinpoint the turning point that marked the decline. This was when the learned Muslims interpreted knowledge acquisition as enjoined by the *Quran* in *iqra* or "read" to mean acquiring only the knowledge of the Islamic religion, rejecting other knowledge as un-Islamic as giving no merit in the afterlife. Following this, the Muslims gave up the study of science, mathematics, medicine and other so-called worldly disciplines. Instead they spent much time debating on Islamic teachings and interpretations, on Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic practices. The differences in the interpretations and understanding of Islam led to a break-up of the ummah and the founding of numerous sects, cults and schools. Such were the differences between them that they often kill and war against each other. To this day they are blowing up each other's mosques to the delight of their detractors. Almost at the same time of the Muslims rejection of worldly knowledge which started them on their decline, the Europeans, benefiting from the early studies and researches of the Muslim scholars achieved their renaissance and went on to develop their countries until they were able to threaten and dominate us, with their wealth, knowledge and military power.

12. Islam is a perfect religion but Muslims are not perfect. It is our imperfections that led to our breaking up, to our quarrels and to our subsequent backwardness and weakness. So weak are we that our holy book is desecrated and caricatures are made of our prophet, who had even been described as a terrorist. To these insults we can only vent our anger in ineffective protests, often killing and maiming our own people. We can be sure there will be more insults. We may derive some satisfaction in venting our anger but that will get us nowhere. We need a permanent solution.

13. We cannot hope to achieve military superiority in order to stop the insults that we suffer from now. Our detractors are too far ahead of us. The time needed would be too long. But we can at least ensure that our countries are stable and well-governed, our infra-structures well developed and our industrial capacities capable of meeting our needs and competing successfully with others. In other words we need development in every field. And this we are certainly capable of doing fairly quickly for Allah has made us no inferior to others and he has endowed us with abundance of resources. Developed and truly independent countries can better resist the domination by others and so gain the respect of all.

Brothers and sisters,

14. The vision commission acknowledges the many achievements of the IDB since its inception in 1395 Hijrah or 1975 Masehi. The bank is among the most successful institutions in the Muslim world. Its membership has grown from the original 22 countries to 56 member countries now, in step with the growth in the membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference or OIC. The bank was a pioneer in Islamic banking and finance, and has contributed to economic development in many member countries.

15. However, in the face of radical changes in the world environment the IDB needs to re-examine its role and reinvent itself in order to tackle the vastly different challenges within the ummah and outside it. While banking is still the primary *raison d'être* of the bank, we need to give greater emphasis to the developmental role of IDB.

16. Development is not a matter of banking prudence alone. It is about stimulating growth, about the improvement of the well being of the people, about better infrastructure, about improvements in human resources and maximizing all the assets that we are endowed with. As Muslims, we are enjoined to be charitable. This does not mean outright gifts only. Investments for reasonable returns by those who can afford to do so would still amount to charity as they can alleviate poverty and sustain economic growth. For these things to happen we have to prepare ourselves for the challenges we have to face. And these are:

- A. First, the challenge of achieving healthy human development;
- B. Second, the challenge of securing strong and sustainable economic growth;
- C. Third, the challenge of promoting good governance;
- D. Fourth, the challenge of strengthening peace and stability;
- E. Fifth, the challenge of fostering a powerful sense of common identity, consciousness and empathy as Muslim brothers and members of the *ummah*; and
- F. Lastly, the challenge of restoring the image of Islam and the Muslim world.

17. Given these challenges, the commission proposes that the IDB be driven by a vision of development in keeping with the teachings of Islam i.e not totally materialistic but creating enough wealth, industrial and technological capability and intrinsic strength to raise the ummah and the religion above the present level to where they cannot be humiliated with impunity. We must balance the striving for *hassanah* in the akhira with *hassanah* in this world, between the spiritual and the material. This stress on the balance between the two is most important as often we are carried away by one to the exclusion of the other. It is this imbalance which had led to our downfall.

18. To achieve this we have identified nine key strategic thrusts which we must undertake under the vision. they are:

- A. First, to reform the IDB;
- B. Second, to alleviate poverty;
- C. Third, to promote health;

- D. Fourth, to universalise education;
- E. Fifth, to prosper the people;
- F. Sixth, to close the gender gap, without breaching the tenets of Islam;
- G. Seventh, to expand the Islamic financial industry and the skills of financial management in accord with Islamic teachings;
- H. Eighth, to facilitate the integration of IDB member country economies among themselves and with the rest of the world; and
- I. Finally, to restore the image of the Muslim world.

19. The nine strategic thrusts and the related goals are critical because they can bring about the development of our countries and the ummah which will help restore the relevance and faith in the teachings of Islam today. In the process it is possible that some member countries would graduate to a stage of development comparable to the most developed countries of the world. If we succeed then we would have redeemed the honour and image of Islam as a religion for all times. It would also serve to show that it is we and not our religion that have been responsible for our failures.

20. I believe the vision that we have outlined and defined will help us to address the challenges facing the Muslim ummah today while correcting the faults and mistakes the past. The vision is not perfect of course. Faults and weakness will show up as we implement it or even before that. But we must not allow polemics to deflect us from the task of achieving the vision, imperfect though it may be. Nothing is worse than to waste our time debating and disagreeing and so to do nothing. If we care to examine, nothing that was done a hundred years ago by the perfectionists of that time would be regarded as perfect today. We laugh at the first aeroplane or automobile for their crudeness. But today's airplane or car are the results of those crude products.

21. We already know that over 1400 years our debates on the interpretation of the one Islam that the prophet s.a.w. had brought to us had only resulted in our being splintered into a thousand sects, and cults. The splintering has undermined our unity, made us enemies of each other instead of brothers as Muslims, and weakened us. In striving to achieve this vision let us not again be splintered by polemics and trivialities and thus be diverted from the task of developing the ummah. Let us appreciate the fundamental need for development as a way to strengthen us and redeem our honour and that of our religion.

22. Islam is not for the times of the prophet only, or the few centuries which followed his teachings. Islam is for all times, through all centuries. It is as relevant today, in this age of information technology as it was 1400 years ago. This we will recognize if we regard the substance of the Islamic teaching as the essence of our faith rather than the form as we usually do. Thus it is justice that is advocated by Islam and not the process or the punishment which is the essence of Islamic jurisprudence. Repeatedly the al-Quran tells us that, "when we judge, judge with justice". Yet we keep on stressing the process of judgment and the punishment while ignoring justice.

23. Similarly when we are enjoined to have the capacity to defend the *ummah*, it is the capacity to defend that is of the essence, and not the ownership of warhorses and the weapons of the time of the prophet. We can display the armour and the weapons of old in our museum. But we must know that they cannot be used to defend us. For that

we need modern military capability. If we do not have this capability then we cannot be considered to have obeyed the injunctions of the Quran.

24. In the effort to achieve *hassanah* in this world, we must achieve good governance, prudence in the management of our wealth and the technological skills comparable with those of our detractors. In other words we must become developed. Nothing in our religion says we cannot be developed. Nor does it say that we can develop only through doing the things done 1,400 years ago.

25. This vision is about development of the Muslim countries and the ummah of the present and the foreseeable future. Allah s.w.t. has endowed us with the same mental and physical capacity as he has endowed others. More than that he has endowed us with the most essential of resources. If we fail to develop as the vision outlines for us it is our fault. We must remember that all good comes from Allah. What is bad, and our failure to develop is bad, is due to us. We cannot be assured of our place in the akhiraat if we continue to allow Islam and the prophet to be insulted with impunity.

Dear brothers and sisters,

26. The commission is privileged and honoured to deliberate on the fate of Muslims in member countries and Muslim minorities in non-member countries during this critical period of their history. We sincerely hope that this Islamic vision of development will be well received by all reasonable and like-minded citizens across the world, Muslim and non-Muslim. It aspires to guide nations and communities as well as the common people to new heights of human achievement and well being in the times to come. Indeed, we call for global understanding in the conduct and management of human affairs guided by a sense of justice, knowledge and high ethical values on the part of the rulers and the ruled. The Islamic vision of development aspires to fulfill that mission.

Brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen,

27. Let me stress that, the future of the Muslims is in our own hands. True, we now live in a world dominated by non-Muslims, economically and politically. True, we now live in a world that is not particularly fond of Muslims. But there is nothing to prevent the ummah from rising again, if the ummah wants to. Muslims can yet again become a force for human good. It remains for us Muslims to decide, and when deciding let us remember the injunction in the al-Quran that Allah *Subhanallahwa ta'ala* will not change our situation unless we ourselves make the effort to change it.

Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.
