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( PRIME MINISTER )

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SIXTH ISLAMIC ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

VENUE: THE ISLAMIC CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR (K.L)

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TIME:

Bismillahir rahmanir rahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Malaysia. Malaysia is indeed proud to be given the opportunity of hosting this conference, and I feel honoured to address such a distinguished group of Muslim scientists, planners and decision-makers who are here to discuss major issues on environment and development in the context of the Islamic world. I wish to congratulate the Islamic Academy of Sciences for organising this conference which is a fitting follow-up to the Earth Summit that was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil last June.

2. Environmental degradation and the need for economic growth and sustainable development is a common concern of all. It is a concern that should rightly transcend limited and parochial interests as it affects present and future generations. The Rio Summit highlighted this concern as well as underscored the inter-relationship and interlinkages between environment and development.

3. At Rio, while there was agreement on the common concern, the rich industrialised countries unfortunately failed to respond favourably to the developmental needs of the developing countries, which in fact included all the countries of the Islamic world. Indeed they even failed to respond to the environmental problems of their own countries. The rich were preoccupied with population growth and management of natural resources in the South, attributing the degradation of the world's environment almost exclusively to these factors.

4. Admittedly, there exists significant differences between the developed and developing countries as to the priorities. The rich North, obviously reluctant to curb its profligate lifestyles, is merely concerned with extending its control over natural resources, particularly resources such as tropical forests, which are only to be found in the South. The South mired and entrapped in poverty, urgently requires economic growth and development, which are only achievable if a supportive international economic system is in place. Such a system requires vision and meaningful com-

mitment from the North to the democratisation of global decision-making, and to make available the necessary resources. If the Earth, in terms of the environment, is to be regarded as a single entity, as a nation is considered a single entity, then the wealth of the rich must be redistributed equitably also among the poor. This is the overriding principle that governs the nation as a unit. It is not the poor begging from the rich. It is pure inadulterated fairness and justice. For Muslims in particular, this concept of justice is familiar. Zakat and Fitrah are not charity contributions but are religious obligations in the interest of social justice in any human society.

5. During the Earth Summit, the leaders reiterated that problems of the environment and development were global, regional, as well as national in nature. Just as environmental problems have transboundary implications, development issues, particularly for developing countries, have transboundary implications as well. Synthetic rubber, plastics, glass fibres and numerous other substitutes for natural products, devised by the developed countries, all retard the development and well-being of the people in the developing countries. The need for continuing dialogue between rich and poor, between North and South, is obvious. If the South is to be effective in ensuring that the protection of the environment will not result in retarding development, then they must achieve solidarity and argue from a common standpoint. The Islamic countries must play their part in achieving this.

6. While North-South interaction and cooperation is central to the prevention of global environmental degradation and the need for sustained economic growth, the South must not ignore the many opportunities available to also enhance South-South cooperation. This Conference, in itself, is a tangible manifestation of South-South cooperation. We have much to gain by learning and working together on these important matters.

7. The scientists of the Islamic world have much to contribute towards South-South cooperation in the field of environment and development. Through intensified interaction among themselves, they can project a model of the kind of cooperation that can be emulated by all the countries of the South. There should be closer collaboration among the scientists in such areas as climate change and biological diversity. Your research findings and technical data will also serve to strengthen the bases of our negotiators as they negotiate the various environment-related conventions and protocols. Sound and verifiable data are crucial if the South is to safeguard its interests in multilateral negotiations.

8. Science and technology have a critical role to play in the global endeavour to protect the environment and to promote sustainable development. Through science and technol-

ogy, our understanding of issues relating to the ecology, economics and society has become more matured, providing us with the bases for making choices in the direction of environmentally acceptable development. In this regard, scholars, scientists and researchers in the Muslim world must not lag behind if they wish to help the Ummah expand and consolidate their scientific and technological base, particularly in the vital area of research and development. Islamic countries, in many instances very richly endowed, must improve their educational and scientific research facilities so as to ensure the capacity of the Ummah to keep up with scientific and technological advancements and to improve on them.

9. In order to accelerate this process and indeed to make the quantum leap that is necessary to improve the quality of life of the Ummah, Muslim scientists must accumulate as much knowledge as possible so as to enable them to develop environmentally sound and appropriate technology. What is suitable for developed countries may not be suitable for developing countries. It is up to the scientists in developing countries to devise and modify the technologies of the developed countries to suit the needs of the developing countries.

10. We are aware that although the basic infrastructure of science and technology is available in many Islamic countries, it is neither large enough nor strong enough to cope with the rapid development in this field that is taking place worldwide. The importance of a strong and sound base of science and technology cannot be over-emphasised. The base underpins our efforts to solve the problems of food, defence, security, shelter, fuel and energy, health and pollution, exploitation of mineral resources and the enhancement of agricultural and industrial production.

11. Malaysia has recognised the need to develop our technological capabilities in our quest for the status of a fully developed nation by the year 2020. Indeed, acquisition of such capabilities represents one of the key strategies under the Second Outline Perspective Plan and the Sixth Malaysia Plan.

12. To be a developed nation does not mean merely achieving the same GNP per capita of the rich countries. This is important of course because national poverty tends to undermine independence. But equally important is the acquisition of knowledge that can contribute towards national security and scientific and technological independence. Without these we will always be supplicants, dependent on the charity of others.

13. But it must be clear that true independence should not lead to the kind of arrogance that results in rash actions and acquisitiveness. As much as we value independence, we must respect the independence of others. Thus being devel-

oped must include the practice of good moral values within society and between societies and nations.

14. Muslim scientists must always remember and adhere to good moral values. Their knowledge should be for the good of the Ummah in general. The Ummah with the help of Muslim scientists must project to the world the true meaning of human civilisation and progress for it is enjoined upon Muslims to acquire knowledge not for evil but for the good of mankind. Certainly the protection of the environment would constitute the application of knowledge for the good of mankind.

15. Fellows of the Islamic Academy of Sciences have a significant role to play in promoting the development of science and technology in the Islamic world. As scientists in the Islamic world, you have a catalytic role in promoting growth and progress of the Islamic world in particular and the rest of the world in general. Individuals as well as Non-Governmental Organisations similarly have their own part in this collective exercise to safeguard the environment while promoting sustained economic growth. The Islamic Academy of Sciences, as a NGO, has a valuable contribution to make, particularly through the morally sound application of science and technology.

16. Islam is a progressive religion. There are no injunctions against the acquisition of knowledge as long as it is not intended for evil. I believe that the many challenges and difficulties that we face can be overcome if we adhere closely to the true teachings of Islam. It was the adherence to the true teachings that led to the Golden Age of Islam. It was during this Age that the various branches of science flourished as a result of the work of Muslim scientists. But when superstition and narrow interpretations of the teachings took over, the glorious Age faded. For as long as we submit to this kind of interpretation, for so long will we be subservient to others.

17. It is my earnest hope that your deliberations in this Conference will result in a better understanding of the problems and issues facing the Muslims scientists in this age, when in addition to their role of uplifting the Muslim Ummah, they have also to contend with the need of developing in a constantly restrictive environmental regime.

18. I wish you success in your deliberations and a pleasant stay in Malaysia.  
Wabillahitaufig walhidayah wassalamualaikum  
warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.