

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: LAUNCHING OF THE BOOK ON "THE ART OF LIVING - RESIDENTIAL
ARCHITECTURE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD"

VENUE: ISLAMIC ART MUSEUM, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 26 MAR 2001

TIME:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organiser the Albukhary Foundation for inviting me to launch the book on "The Art of Living - Residential Architecture in the Islamic World" here today.

2. The study of Islamic architecture is a vast field indeed; one that covers mosques and palaces, cities and forts, desert dwellings and urban town houses, across an expanse of three continents. Islamic architecture throughout the world has a regional identity, a stylistic evolution and a relevance to the eternal principles of Islam. Such is the influence of Islamic architecture that many adopt it quite unconsciously, regarding it as their own. This is especially in countries which had for long periods been under Muslim rule. And this architecture is exported to their colonies abroad which have now become independent nations.

3. In the course of our travels, my wife and I have been fortunate enough to visit many homes both here and abroad and witness firsthand the beautiful architecture of Islamic lands. It is amazing that the injunction of Islam against representations of figures of living creatures have not in the least reduced the beauty of Islamic architecture. Indeed it has fostered the development of geometrical designs which are even more beautiful. It has earned the description "Arabesque".

4. "Maskan" is the equivalent of "residence" in both the Arabic and Persian languages. Its literal meaning is "a place for relief", as the word "mosakken" from the same root is the general name for painkillers and tranquilisers. The house in Islamic thought is a harmonious and peaceful location in which man becomes one with his inner reality, spends pleasant times with his family and celebrates the glory of his creator in the most pure, humble and personal manner.

5. The design, the material used for construction, the decorations and the overall inner space of an

Islamic house and its relationship with the outer space, along with the lifestyle of the dweller, reveal valuable information regarding aesthetic principles, sense of beauty, social and moral values, political conditions of the time, the economic status of dwellers and the climate of the area. Islamic houses may, therefore, be considered as living encyclopedias of a rich religious tradition. Despite their diverse materials and decorations, they share a principal identity deeply rooted in the Islamic faith.

6. The Islamic house is a private sanctuary and the public and private life are strictly demarcated in Islamic society and expressed architecturally. The focus on interior space, seen in the presence of courtyards, is a quality that is distinctively Islamic. Light and water are important elements in Islam which further contribute to the beauty and serenity of the home. Gardens, water channels, pool, fountains and fruit trees reflect the perception of Muslims of what paradise in afterlife is like.

7. Islamic houses throughout the world display the art of living in an artistic manner. The 'Art of Living', is to live in harmony with the people we associate with, the environment we live in and the Creator we worship.

8. The Islamic homes around the world, whether in Spain, Saudi Arabia, India or here in Malaysia, have adapted and responded to different cultures and existing traditions of building without weakening the spiritual essence which is their source of inspiration.

9. I hope this book "The Art of Living - Residential Architecture in the Islamic World" will be a practical source book for all those who are interested in the Islamic heritage of domestic architecture. I also congratulate the photographer, Mr. Ovidio Guaita, on his beautiful photography and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia for organising this visual documentary of the details of Islamic heritage.

10. On that note, I have great pleasure in launching the book "The Art of Living - Residential Architecture in the Islamic World".