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INTERCIVILISATIONAL UNDERSTANDING**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

1. Let me first thank the Rt. Hon. Jack Straw for his kind words of introduction; Dr Farhan Nizami, a respected scholar, whom I have known for many years; and all of the representatives from the academia, business and diplomatic communities who are present here today.
2. I am immensely pleased to join you as a guest of Oxford University, where earlier this afternoon I had the chance to meet some very talented young students and to visit the future OCIS building, an inspirational environment, which blends Islamic and Malay traditions with your own rich Oxford heritage.
3. It is an enormous honour to be here in the renowned Sheldonian Theatre, which has echoed with the words of so many luminaries over the years. Every year dozens of Malaysians travel to Oxford to study, finding a home away from home in the Oxford University Malaysia Club. The Khazanah-OCIS Merdeka Scholarship, established in 2006 to mark the 50th anniversary of Malaysian independence, have boosted the numbers. And with the Malaysian Securities Commission and OCIS now collaborating on the study of emerging issues in Islamic finance, the bonds between our two countries will be further strengthened.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Diversity, dialogue and peaceful co-existence are important themes in Islam. In the holy Quran, Allah SWT expounds that, the very reason He creates human beings into distinct nations and tribes is as a blessing so that humanity may embrace and celebrate their diversity. When then, did Islam and extremism become synonymous? When then, did perpetrators of hate and terror hijack the religion of peace and compassion? How did acts of extremism by a few minorities of Muslims come to be seen as a

reflection of Islam and its followers? Such vile misrepresentations are a source of great anguish to me and to the vast majority of Muslims.

5. When four young men headed south from Yorkshire one morning in July, six years ago, maybe they thought the home-made bombs they carried in their backpacks made them “real Muslims”. Maybe they thought that by blowing themselves up they were acting in accordance with the will of Allah, that they were following the teachings of the Quran. How wrong they were.
6. I would like to emphatically state that, those who strap explosives on their bodies and blow themselves up are not martyrs. They do not represent Islam. Unknowingly, they are misguided into committing a grievous sin. So do, all those who preach hate and stoke the fire of intolerance in leading to this most blasphemous act, they too are as guilty as the perpetrators. Our heart goes out to their victims who are innocent, defenceless civilians going about their daily life. Islam never condones such a vile act. Neither is it part of the teachings of Islam.
7. In fact, Islam abhors suicide; as stated clearly in the Holy Quran, Chapter 2 verse 195 which reads: “*do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction*”. Therefore, suicide is impermissible under any circumstances. Life in Islam is a sacred trust from the Almighty whose fate shall be determined by His will alone. It is pertinent to note that under the five higher objectives of Islamic law or “*maqasid syariah*” the first and foremost concern is the protection and preservation of life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. A world free from terrorism is possible. It is not beyond our reach. It needs men and women of goodwill among the faithful of all creeds; it requires a vanguard of the moderates, it demands us to stop being a silent majority and to start reflecting the courage of our conviction. We must address the underlying causes of global violence. Merely going after specific individuals, dismantling their organizations, disrupting their finances and discrediting their ideologies is far from enough. We must be able to differentiate between the symptoms and the root causes. Only then, can we achieve a lasting solution.
9. It would be too easy to say that the solution to Islamic extremism is simply for more Muslims to speak up and to speak out. Yes, it is our responsibility, but it is not ours alone. Just as Muslims need to make their voices heard, so do the Christians, the Jews, the Buddhists, the Hindus and the Atheists who are sickened by intolerance, violence and terror and need to make their voices heard. We need to hear the concerted voices

from moderates in all countries and from all walks of life. And when we do, the prize of peace is there for all to see.

10. But while one man standing in the road is a nuisance, a mere distraction, ten men standing together are far harder to ignore. And if those ten become a hundred, a thousand, a million, a billion even, they become a force so big, so strong and so united in their common cause that those who espouse hatred will face a very simple choice. They can join us, or they can remain where they are and be crushed by the force of our collective will.
11. So it is for people who cherish moderation, dignity and justice everywhere to stand firm, and stand proud, to dissipate the pull of terror and to deny those at the margins a foothold in the middle ground – ensuring that frustrations, wherever they are felt, are heeded and that voices, wherever they speak out, are heard.
12. Quite simply, we cannot allow this moment to be overtaken by extremists, with those who shout loudest gaining the most.
13. That is why we are all here this evening to foster not a clash of civilisations but to further an understanding, and perhaps even a celebration of our difference and, at the same time, of everything we share. Modernisation and moderation must go hand in hand. Our dialogue must continue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Allow me to relate the Malaysian experience. Providence and history has endowed us with a nation-state that epitomises the very essence of diversity. Malaysia is blessed not only with ethnic diversity but also of culture, language and religion. Since independence in 1957, with the exception of the May 13 tragedy, Malaysians have lived in relative peace and stability.
15. In Malaysia, Islam is synonymous with moderation, inclusiveness and good governance. Sixty percent of Malaysians are Muslims, the other forty percent profess a variety of faiths i.e. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and others. Although, the Malaysian Constitution provides for Islam as the religion of the Federation, it protects the right of all Malaysians to practise their religion in peace and harmony.
16. In light of this diversity, national unity continues to be the overriding objective. Since assuming the office of Prime Minister in April 2009, I have continued to make this overarching goal the top priority of my administration through the guiding philosophy of 1Malaysia, emphasising People First, Performance Now.

17. In managing our plurality, we have decided on integration as opposed to assimilation. Malaysians accept their diversity. We do not merely tolerate each other but we also embrace and celebrate. By leveraging the robustness and dynamism of our diversity, we have created a foundation for our national resilience.
18. In the short span of fifty years, Malaysians have managed to transform from a low-income agricultural economy dependent on a few commodities into a diversified modern industrial upper middle-income nation. The United Nations Development Programme currently classifies Malaysia as a high Human Development Index nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Islam is practised as a way of life in Malaysia. The government advocates a path of Wasatiyah or justly balanced moderation whether in formulating and executing domestic policies or in conducting international relations. Let me put this in perspective so that there will be no room for confusion or misinterpretation.
20. I would like to stress that the principle of moderation is not new in Islam. Wasatiyah, is a recurring theme in the Quran. Verse 143 Chapter 2 states:

“We have made you into a community that is justly balanced”.

The Quran goes further that with moderation, there must be justice and justice presupposes knowledge and freedom. It is therefore important to remember that education, coupled with democratic principles of freedom, allows us to choose what is good and virtuous. It is only logical that moderates choose a path that is true and right. Moderates must defend and promote these ideals. What is false or misleading should be rejected and expunged.

21. Moderation is also advocated in Christianity. If I may quote from the Bible, Philippians Chapter 4 verse 5 which says:
“Let your moderation be known unto all men...”

This essentially calls for all Christians to live their daily lives in moderation and not do anything in excess. Judaism also calls for the middle road. The Torah teaches that moderation in life and etiquette, in character and traits, as well as in one's lifestyle is a 'way of life' in the truest sense of Jewish customs. In Taoism, the principle of moderation is considered a critical component of one's personal development and forms part of the three pillars of its teaching.

22. There is no such thing as a liberal Islam or an extremist Islam, a conservative Islam or an enlightened Islam, a jihadist Islam or an appeasing Islam, a modern Islam or a

medieval Islam. There is only Islam, a complete way of life. Being moderate cannot in any way be equated to a wimp, unprincipled, weak or appeasing.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. In following the best Islamic tradition, Malaysia shall not waver from supporting what is right and just notwithstanding whether the cause is championed by the Islamic world or beyond. We shall not retreat in the defence of the weak and the oppressed whatever their creed or colour. We will not be silenced from speaking the truth.
24. We are now all too aware of the dangers of terrorism and violent extremism. From the 9/11 attacks, to the Madrid and Bali bombings, to the destruction caused here in London, many live in continuous fear of losing their lives at any given moment.
25. As chapters of the history of terrorism and extreme violence are still being written, its plot pivots around a single question - Why do people take such extreme measures to the extent of taking another's life or even their own? I am sure that many here are aware of some of the more common factors that lead people to commit such atrocities. It has often been cited that lack of economic development and education has led some people to turn to extreme measures like terrorism. In other cases, it is despair and a sense of utter hopelessness. Humiliation is another wellspring. While most have acknowledged these factors, if we observe more carefully, we will find that some terrorists come from well-off families and are very much educated.
26. In most cases, it is a combination of these factors that terrorism continues to persist. For them, terrorism is the pursuit of political goals through other means. They also hide behind the mask of religion in pursuit of their goals. Some really believe that other religions and civilisations represent the enemy and that there is no place for peaceful coexistence. For them, the world is a zero sum game where one side can win only at the expense of the other. They propagate this to get others to fight and die for their cause. Thus, in a peculiar way, the role of religion has ironically, increased the scale and lethality of the terrorist threat considerably.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. Terrorism and extremism are serious challenges. Overcoming them requires clear thinking based on an objective assessment of the situation. One real and symbolic cause looming large as a rallying cry for global extremism is the unresolved Middle East problem, the plight of the Palestinian people. It has haunted the global conscience for far too long. Every peace-loving nation which seeks a better world must work towards an everlasting resolution based on the principles of a viable two state solution and equitable justice for all involved.
28. Malaysia unequivocally supports the struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent, sovereign and viable homeland of their own under the umbrella of the

United Nations Security Council Resolutions. The world owes the Palestinian people a debt of honour; the people of Palestine have suffered for far too long. The Palestinian people have been expelled from their land, their homes destroyed before their very eyes; they have been humiliated and subjugated while the world watched. Oppressed and denied their most fundamental right to life and liberty with dignity and hope have led to tragic and heart wrenching consequences. It is time to put real action in place of grandstanding and mere rhetoric.

29. In supporting the Palestinian and other righteous causes, Malaysia will not support violence against non-combatants, civilians, women, children, the aged and infirm. In short, those who cannot defend themselves whatever the justification. Some argue that desperation has led to unorthodox methods of warfare. To them I would urge to heed to principle of Islam that the end never justifies the means.
30. That is why, at the United Nations in September last year, I called for a Global Movement of the Moderates that would see government, intellectuals, religious scholars and business leaders across the world take a united stand. For it is the spirit of Wasatiyah – ‘moderation’ or ‘balance’ – that must now prevail all around the globe.
31. There is no doubt that the scale and speed of the events unfolding across the Arab world in recent months has at times felt almost overwhelming. But amidst the chaos and the confusion we should not lose sight of the fact that these countries and peoples now face a fateful choice – the choice between extremism and intolerance that closes in to fill the void and a peaceful, democratic moderation that will grant them more freedom of expression, not less.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

32. In the words of Samuel Johnson, society cannot subsist “but by reciprocal concessions”, and that is how modern, multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural Malaysia not only subsists but develops and grows. Far from encouraging “different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream” Malaysia’s integration and inclusivity has always been the key formula for success.
33. But if my stance is idealistic, it is hard-headedly realistic. Many great Islamic scholars have been concerned with how Islam with its religious, cultural, political, ethical and economic world view can help solve some of the biggest challenges we face today. These are questions that interest me – how moderation can solve the problem of extremism but also, in more unexpected ways, how it can help us through the global economic crisis.

34. It is no coincidence that institutions working to Islamic principles survived the worst of the economic crisis. Islamic finance puts the public good ahead of individual gain. And it is perhaps worthy to note that Islamic bank would not have been permitted to spend and lend so much more money than it actually possessed.
35. The Islamic world is already showing that it can be an economic force. Malaysia is the world leader in Islamic finance. Malaysia is also the world leader in the issuance of sukuk or Islamic bond with 60 per cent of it originating from Malaysia.
36. The great potential of Islamic finance is not hard to see. There are more than one and a half billion Muslims living in countries around the world. There are more than 400 Islamic banks in over 50 countries, including right here in the United Kingdom.
37. In this regard, I believe we should look closely at how the structures of Islamic finance can support the new global economic architecture that is emerging. Indeed, in place of excess Islamic finance offers moderation and transparency. In place of greed, Islamic finance offers fairness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

38. Moderation is not an alien concept to mankind. Neither is it only theoretical in nature. It is a real living principle that can be gleaned from the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that after years of being persecuted, harassed and oppressed by the pagan Quraishites, he started his reign of Mecca later, with dignity, forgiveness and compassion.
39. Moderation can also be seen from the conduct of Nelson Mandela who after being incarcerated for 27 years, 18 of those spent in an eight by eight foot cell, allowed only one letter and one visitor every six months. After he was released and when asked by journalist Sir David Frost “how is it that you got through 28 years, you were wrongly incarcerated, and you’re not bitter?” Mandela answered, “David, I would like to be bitter, but there is no time to be bitter. There is work to be done...”.
40. In his inaugural address as President in 1994, Nelson Mandela eloquently put forth the ringing clarion call:

“Let there be justice for all.
Let there be peace for all.
Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.
Let each know that for each body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves.”

41. It is testimony to his sense of moderation and his leadership that there was no bloody retribution in South Africa for all the evils and injustices perpetrated against the black majority during the apartheid regime.
42. Again, moderation was manifested in the works of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of non-violent struggle, who freed a nation through his faith in the inherent goodness of man.
43. Moderation is also reflected in the struggle of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. In his dream for a more equal America, he appealed to its highest ideals of using non violent means following in the footsteps of Gandhi rather than debasing his struggle by stooping to the low of his opponents.
44. In the case of the United Kingdom, cast your mind back, if you will, to the darker days in Northern Ireland. In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, extremists on both sides of the sectarian divide tried to plunge the country back into violence. But the massed ranks of the moderates, from both the nationalist and loyalist communities, stood up as one and uttered with a single voice a firm, resounding “no”:

No, they did not want to be cast back into the shadow of the bullet and the bomb.
No, they were not prepared to sacrifice the new prosperity that came with peace.
No, they would not let the vicious actions of a few dictate life for the many.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

45. Edmund Burke, the philosopher, was quoted to have said, all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.
46. Our choice is clear. Come together in action for a future of justice, freedom, hope, compassion and goodwill for our children or it will be replaced by a future of injustice, tyranny, hopelessness, cruelty and hate. Because the real divide is not between East and West or between the developed and developing worlds or even between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is between moderates and extremists of all religions. Together, let us embrace moderation as the best course of action and for the best way forward.

Thank you.