

**THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF MODERATES
19/01/2012**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wa barakatuh, Salam Sejahtera dan Salam 1Malaysia.

YB Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal,
Minister of Rural and Regional Development, Malaysia.

His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Shihab,
Minister of Finance and Treasury, Maldives.

YBhg. Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Bin Haji Hassan
President of International Islamic University Malaysia

YBhg. Tan Sri Razali Ismail
Chairman of the Board of Advisors, Global Movement of Moderates

1. First, on behalf of the people and the government of Malaysia, I would like to welcome international delegates and distinguished speakers to this conference. I believe your discussions and deliberations at this three-day conference have been very enlightening and fruitful in our quest to promote moderation as a core universal value that contributes to lasting global peace and harmony. I also wish to thank the organizing committee for inviting me to say a few words at the closing ceremony of this conference.

The Historical Context

2. Allow me to briefly mention at the outset the historical context in which contemporary discourse about moderation and the moderates emerge. As we know, at the end of the cold war, many people thought that the war between communism and the West was about to be replaced by a war between the West and Muslims. The Gulf War, the Bosnian conflict, the World Trade Centre bombing and the growing influence of Islamist movements in the Middle-East, Turkey, Central Asia and across the Muslim world gave an impression that there lies an Islamic threat against the West.

3. Throughout the 1990s, Samuel P. Huntington's seminal work, Clash of Civilizations, generated so much interest in the academia as well as in the media. It seemed that confrontations drawn along the fault lines of ideology and religion were inevitable. In particular, the prophecy of an imminent conflict between two great civilizations, namely Islam and the Christian West sent tremors across the world.

4. It was rather unfortunate that the tragic event on September 11, 2001 accentuated the images of conflict between Islam and the West. Eventually, the post 9/11 world was marked by growing Islamophobia in the West and across the world. From Osama Ben Laden to the Taliban in Afghanistan, the vision of militant Islam as a threat to the West has gripped the imaginations of Western governments and the media.

5. For more than a decade, the image of Islam as the religion of peace and moderation was

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ وَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَ

Which means, “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”.
(Surah al-Hujrat; Verse 13)

The Necessity of Moderation

12. Apart from religious injunctions, the political, social and economic realities that we are facing today necessitate the practice of moderation. On the economic front, Western countries are major trading partners of the Muslim world. As much as the West depends on Muslim countries for natural resources, Muslim countries rely on economic prosperity of the West as major importers of goods and services to accelerate the process of economic development at home. As we know, for decades a peace, prosperous and developed West created millions of jobs and countless economic opportunities for Muslims in their respective countries. It will be folly for Muslims to believe that economic and political destruction of the West will bring economic prosperity and political stability to the Muslim world.

13. At the same time, growing population of Muslims in the West has changed the social and cultural demography of Western society. For instance, in Europe today, a key debate is about how to integrate and assimilate new Muslim population into the European society without necessarily eroding European cultures, traditions and identity. No doubt, the success of this process of integration and assimilation will have far-reaching consequences on lasting peace and stability of European countries.

14. As Muslims are making inroads into the West, bringing together their values and social practices into the fabric of Western societies, the social and political values of the West are also increasingly being embraced by Muslims. The values of human rights, freedom and liberty, which were once associated with the West, now form part and parcel of the life of Muslims. It is not uncommon now to find Islamic groups and Muslim-based political parties together with civil society movements participate in democratic processes and clamor for democratic reform. The political transformation currently underway in Muslim countries shows that the value of democracy can sit easily with the value of moderation, justice and compassion in Islam.

15. The political, social and cultural interactions between the Muslim world and the West, which is now being reinforced by the forces of globalization, brings about new perspective on the relationship between Islam and the West. For Muslims, the classical demarcation line that separates Dar al-Islam (the realm of Islam) from Dar al-Harb (the realm of war) has now become obsolete. It is not proper for Muslims to regard the West as their enemies when the cultural and social demography of the West itself is undergoing tremendous change as a result of its rising Muslim population. Likewise, it is no longer fitting for the West to regard Islam as the new fascism which poses imminent threat to the security of its nations and the future of its civilizations. The truth is, the Muslims themselves are becoming more familiar and receptive of the values of Western civilizations.

16. The future path of global peace and prosperity must be built upon mutual understanding

and respect between communities which represent the world major civilizations. Be it Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism and other world major civilizations, all must work for the perpetuation of peaceful co-existence between people of different religions and cultures. This necessitates a shift in our perspective from clash of civilizations to civilizational engagement. In this particular context, the practice of moderation and the rejection of extremism is the key to civilizational engagement and global peace. Only by rejecting extremism and embracing moderation will we be able to treat others with dignity, accept our differences and live with each other in peace and harmony. In today's world, moderation is not an option, but a must.

Moderation in Other Faiths

17. We are fortunate that all major religions and civilizations advocate moderation as a way of life. Christianity and Confucianism abhor extravagance and opulence which symbolize an extreme behavior in the conduct of one's life. Likewise, in Hinduism, the concept of middle path that calls for divine centered living without renouncing the world is considered the best means to achieve salvation. In the same vein, Buddhism advocates Middle Way between all extremes by avoiding fanaticism and laziness in the journey to nirvana.

18. If we can see the nature of religion through the prism of moderation, we will be able to identify a common shared value that runs through all religions. That value is peace, harmony and true happiness which will materialize when the followers of every religion avoid excessiveness in religious practices and in the conduct of worldly life. I believe if everybody can nurture the spirit of moderation, which implies rejection of excessiveness and extremism, there will be no harm done to human kind in the name of religion or ideology.

19. At the same time, we need to address the root cause of extremism and fanaticism which often lead to hatred and enmity between people of different religions and cultures, namely economic alienation, political exclusion and social deprivation. We need to replace economic alienation with equitable distribution of wealth; we need to end political exclusion by promoting political inclusiveness; we need to eliminate social deprivation by upholding social justice and respect for human dignity. We believe that the seeds of goodness will only bear fruit when the root cause of evil are completely annihilated.

Moderation in Malaysia

Ladies and gentlemen,

20. Moderation has been the pillar of Malaysia's success in dealing with ethnic and religious diversity. Being part of the Malay world where great civilizations meet, Malaysia has been blessed with peace and prosperity that is built upon mutual understanding and respect among its multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. Despite being a plural society from the start, we thank the Almighty God that we have so far been successful in maintaining peace and averting conflict by promoting moderation as a national culture.

21. We promote moderation through active involvement of the government and the civil society in educating the people about the values of moderation and peace. The government working together with religious communities and the civil society have been actively promoting religious harmony as a main pillar of national unity. A Committee on Inter-Religious Harmony was formed with a view to promote common values shared by all

religions as a means to encourage mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between different religious communities. I must say that our success as a nation depends on the willingness of the moderates from all religions and cultures to set aside differences and work for a common goal in perpetuating peace, harmony and prosperity for our people.

22. It is my great pleasure today in conjunction with this conference to launch an important work on Islamic moderation as it is envisioned and practiced in Malaysia and the Malay world. Professor Tan Sri Mohd. Kamal Hassan, a renowned professor of Islamic studies from the International Islamic University Malaysia, has come up with a great book entitled “Voice of Islamic Moderation From the Malay World”, which compiles evidences from the Qur’an and prophetic traditions which extol the essence of Islam as the religion of moderation. There are also numerous empirical evidences which epitomize moderation as the foundation of peace, harmony and stability in the Malay world in general and in Malaysia in particular.

23. I am glad to quote a passage in Tan Sri Mohd Kamal Hassan’s book which is of great interest to me. I quote, “The voice of Islamic moderation coming from contemporary Malaysia is a reflection of the Malaysian milieu in which Islamic thought has been nurtured in a multi-ethnic society in which Muslims, though in the majority, have lived and co-existed with non-Muslims of various ethnic and religious groups in peace and harmony ... This democratic set-up has molded a national culture which makes political or religious extremism unpopular and uncalled for. The winning formula for all communities has always been one in which there is a realistic recognition of the pluralistic nature of the nation and the need to balance between the particular interest of a community and the larger interest of national stability, national security and national wellbeing, without stepping beyond the limits of freedom as provided for in the Constitution of the nation,” unquote.

24. I believe the value of moderation will continue to provide lasting peace, harmony and stability for Malaysia and for the world community. This requires the coalition of the willing among the moderates of the world to persistently promote moderation as a global value. I do hope that this international conference, the idea of which was mooted by Malaysian Prime Minister, The Honorable Dato’ Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Abdul Razak, and the actions that will follow from it will provide avenues for the moderates from all major civilizations of the world to work hand in hand in the promotion of just and lasting peace for the wellbeing of the global community.

25. On this note, it is my great pleasure to close the International Conference on Global Movement of Moderates and officially launch Professor Tan Sri Mohd. Kamal Hassan’s book, “The Voice of Islamic Moderation From the Malay World”.

Wabillahi al-taufiq wal hidayah wassalamu’alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

Thank you.