

Penyampai : DATO SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BT HJ MOHD ALI
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"PHILANTHROPY IN THE CONTEXT OF A CARING SOCIETY"

I would like to begin by giving three quotes that represent the spirit of this gathering: first, Prophet Muhammad, S.A.W. said, "The Hand That Gives, Is Greater Than The Hand That Receives"; second, some of you may still remember the lyrics of one of Allahyarham Tan Sri P. Ramli's songs, " . tolong kami, bantu kami, anak- anak yatim piatu .."; third, the famous industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's gospel of wealth - -- that a rich man should spend the first part of his life acquiring wealth and the second part distributing it; Mr. Carnegie once said, " . the man who dies rich dies disgraced". I am very sure in our multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, one can find hundreds of sayings and examples that capture the essence of philanthropic acts.

2. I would like to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia for this invitation and opportunity to be part of this historic event - this conference on the State of Philanthropy in Malaysia and to launch a ground breaking study that examines various dimensions of Philanthropy in this country.

3. Malaysia has a rich tradition of giving and sharing. This is evident in the array of institutions that depend on public donations such as shelter homes for children, for the physically and mentally impaired as well as for abused women and the elderly; service centres for kidney dialysis, and NGOs that work for various charitable causes. Public response to appeals for donations for medical treatment from those unable to afford the cost of treatment have always been favourable. The most recent was the launching by the Malaysian AIDS Foundation's campaign to raise RM2 million to help fight AIDS through greater public awareness.

4. When there is a natural disaster or catastrophe, Malaysians contribute generously. Malaysians never failed to give for humanitarian causes. These include contributions to victims of the Gujarat earthquake in India and of famine in North Korea; to the sick children in Iraq as well as to the Afghan refugees. Our conscience disturbs us; we donate money, gifts, time and voluntary services to relieve human sufferings and to improve the quality of life of those less fortunate than ourselves.

5. It is not only individuals who contribute to charitable causes. Institutions such as corporations, foundations and religious organisations do so in the field of philanthropy. The media too has played a key role in the drive for contributions towards urgent medical cases and for victims of disasters such as fire and floods.

6. Corporations are beginning to recognise that some of the profits they make must go back to society. Corporations are blazing new trails through social investments in communities where they operate. Malaysian companies and multi-national corporations have often come to the rescue of those in need.

7. We as a nation are spurred by humanitarian causes not only for reasons of compassion and concern for others, but also due to our religious beliefs, teachings, cultural values and practices. All the major religions practised in Malaysia - Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity - inculcate in us good values and the concern for all human beings. The Quranic concept of giving is defined as charitable giving, compassion for others and social justice. The Quran states `one has to give before one can come closer to God'.

8. But our generosity is mainly of the welfare or charity type. We are less inclined to contribute towards programmes such as HIV/AIDS, conservation of the environment, promotion of culture and the arts, consumerism, women's rights, etc.

9. Even in education, our contributions have been focused on providing scholarships. We are reluctant for

example to donate for research that is fundamental to the development of societies. Our philanthropic acts are selective. We refrain from contributing to causes such as HIV/AIDS and those involving problems of single mothers. Perhaps this is because of unfounded prejudices and stigmatisations. Although in Malaysia the trend of giving is influenced by factors such as religion, culture and traditions, we must recognise that prejudices also play a part in the philanthropic behaviour of Malaysians. Educating them on the unfounded prejudices thus becomes crucial.

10. Our contributions towards welfare, medical treatment and education have largely been in terms of monetary contributions. We do not hesitate to dip into our pockets for these causes. But philanthropy is not just about giving money or material goods like food, clothes or medicines. Philanthropy includes voluntary services and voluntary associations. Voluntary service is giving one's time for philanthropic activities.

Voluntary association involves playing active roles in voluntary organisations or the non-profit sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. The study on Practices of Individual Giving in Penang carried out by Universiti Sains Malaysia shows that about 26 percent of individuals in Penang are members of the voluntary sector. That members and volunteers of non-profit organisations spend about four hours (3.92 hours) weekly for purposes of charity is another finding of the study. However in the absence of any national studies on voluntary services there are no benchmarks to state if these figures reflect the norm for voluntary services by individuals. However, these figures do indicate that there are vast opportunities for all of us to give time for voluntary services that can improve the quality of life of the less fortunate in society.

12. The picture of philanthropy generally seems to show many positive trends in Malaysia, but there are concerns we need to address in order to enhance philanthropy and to achieve the goals of a caring society.

13. Some pertinent and fundamental questions therefore need to be raised in our endeavours to promote a society that gives and cares. Can we increase the amount of donations? Can we expand the areas to which we give from the traditional to the non-traditional such as for HIV/AIDS causes to research and development, to the protection of the environment, to the concerns of single mothers and human rights education? Can we encourage more Malaysians to give their time for voluntary services?

14. Non-Malaysians who reside in Malaysia are known for their voluntary services and contributions. How can we encourage more non-Malaysians who live here to contribute towards philanthropic activities?

15. There are also the concerns of accountability and transparency on both sides of the coin: those individuals and organisations that raise funds and those of recipients of public donations. Recent media reports have highlighted the issues of accountability and transparency of recipients of public donation.

16. These and other concerns need to be addressed through research, policy interventions, campaigns and participation by all sectors --- civil society, business and government. We need to look at strategies to increase the capacity to give more and to increase our voluntary services base. Traditional communities were organised around kinship patterns of caring and giving. The concept of gotong-royong ensures that the helpless and the needy are not alone or abandoned.

17. Today, modernisation and urbanisation and the consequent symptoms of breakdown in family and community life have made organised philanthropy and resource mobilisation a necessity. Even in the wealthiest of nations inequities exist and disasters occur; HIV/AIDS is prevalent and research is vital. Environmental protection is crucial and the rights of women must be championed while children need protection. Should we not address these issues through philanthropic activities? It is therefore a fact that the investigation and development of the phenomena of philanthropy is relevant to all nations.

18. The groundbreaking study on The State of Philanthropy in Malaysia by the School of Social Sciences

at Universiti Sains Malaysia is timely. Currently there is very little documentation, research or oral histories of philanthropy and philanthropists in Malaysia. Many philanthropists have contributed to the field of education for example. But some of these distinguished men and women are no longer with us. We have lost insights into their motivations for giving, their choice of sectors for their contributions, their guidance on how to encourage society to give more and so forth. However, a significant number of philanthropists are still with us - let us record their thoughts on philanthropy through a series of oral history and research. The USM study has opened a terrain of philanthropy. We should be encouraged to do more.

19. The time is opportune for us to bring back the spirit of gotong royong or voluntary services particularly among the young. One strategy would be to make it mandatory for every student at school, college or university to undertake an hour or two of community service. It can be in the form of assisting a disabled person or the elderly or planting a tree or other kinds of community work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. The conference today on the State of Philanthropy in Malaysia is certainly a historic one. I understand the distinguished speakers and moderators are well-known individuals, corporations and institutions who have contributed to the development and growth of philanthropy in Malaysia. I am sure your deliberations today will contribute to the growth of volunteerism, the voluntary sector and to the need for contributions, both monetary and material. It will bring to the forefront what should be very dear to all of us: the philanthropic spirit.

21. Malaysia does not have a centre on philanthropy. In the rest of the world, there is a proliferation of institutions that address various aspects of philanthropy. To name a few: The Center of Philanthropy at Indiana University; Center for the Study of Philanthropy at the City University of New York; The Canadian Center of Philanthropy; Philanthropy Australia. Even in India, Pakistan and Thailand there exist such centres. For those who are savvy in IT, there is even a search engine on philanthropy: PhilanthropySearch.com.

22. I understand that Universiti Sains Malaysia is seriously thinking to set up the centre for philanthropy as well as offer courses in philanthropic studies. Its Pro Chancellor, Tan Sri Razali Ismail in his recent 31st Convocation has expressed such intentions. Congratulations to USM. There are nine countries in Asia that host such centres but these are mainly private NGO initiatives. USM will be the first university in Asia to set up a centre for philanthropy. It is my hope that such a centre will not only contribute to the progress of philanthropy in Malaysia but also within the region. Philanthropy must move beyond domestic concerns as we become more globalised as a nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen; 23. I wish to record my appreciation to the Research Team responsible for the publication of "A Giving Society? The State of Philanthropy in Malaysia". I understand they worked as volunteers on the project - The Philanthropy Initiative of Malaysia. Syabas.

24. The study, the conference and eventually the establishment of the Centre for Philanthropy will hopefully contribute towards achieving a caring society in the context of Vision 2020. I wish you a successful Conference and I look forward to the conclusions and recommendations from the deliberations.

Thank you.