

04/08/2009 - International Conference On Management Of Resources In Muslim Countries And Communities: Challenges And Prospects

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullah wabarakatuh and a very good morning.

Prof. Dato' Sri Dr. Syed Arabi Idid  
Rector, IIUM

Prof. Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim  
Chairperson of the Conference,

Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners, Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Esteemed international and local guests,  
Academic and Administrative Staff of IIUM,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Allow me to first welcome all our delegates to this Conference. To our foreign delegates, welcome to Malaysia. I hope you will make time to visit the many interesting places in Malaysia. To all those who have worked tirelessly in putting together this event, thank you for your effort and hard work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Have we become spectator to growth?

2. Over a billion Muslims had struggled for independence from colonial rule with the hopes and aspirations to an improved quality of life and dignity. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, most Muslim countries would have enjoyed over half a century of their independence and sovereign identity of post colonial period.

3. By comparison nonetheless, in the same period, we see countries like India, China, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan achieving phenomenal growth in economic development and prosperity. In some areas, these nations have set global benchmarks in education standards, business environment, healthcare facilities and standards of living. Some of these countries only saw independence as recent as 60 years ago when compared to the Empires which Muslim nations led in the past.

4. How do Muslim nations stack up by comparison? What is it that these nations have which Muslim nations don't? The poignant reality is that we are blessed with much more and over. It is no secret that our lands are blessed with an abundance of gold, oil, uranium and other invaluable minerals. Yet we still receive billion of dollars of aids from other countries and seek foreign expertise for own development.

5. Our history pales in comparison to our present. The empires of the Umayyads, Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Mughals, the Safavids, and Ottomans were amongst the most powerful in the world. They gave rise to many centres of culture and science. They produced notable scientists, astronomers, mathematicians, doctors, nurses and philosophers during the Golden Age of Islam. There was much investment in economic infrastructure. Technology flourished. The importance of reading the Qur'an produced a comparatively high level of literacy in the general populace.

6. Today we have lost the lustre of the Golden Age of Islam. Muslim nations globally are playing "catch up" to Western economies and countries. Even though Muslims make almost 30% of the world's population, we have yet to build globally comparable nations to the West or at a localised scale, even global brands in our businesses and institutions. How many of our brands are comparable to the likes of

Citibanks, Gucci, Harvard, Insead, Swatch, Audi, Disneyland, Liverpool and Barcelona football club, Shell, CNN, BBC to name but a few brands across industries.

7. We have become investors to brands built by the West. We do not have leaders and innovators of our own global brands. How is it that we are blessed with much, with a third of the globe resided by Muslims, yet unable to deliver comparable competition globally on all fronts? Have we become spectators to the achievements of others? And if so why is this?

#### The Brain Drain Syndrome

8. Muslim majority and minority nations are not lacking in skills and expertise. But the irony however is that, often Muslim connoisseurs and specialists are drawn to serving the Western and more developed countries. The enablers are made more attractive for these talents to shine in the environment of the West, by and large.

9. Are our markets bridled with obstacles and predicaments, that we are no longer able to attract and retain our own best talents? Have we enabled our brothers and sisters to excel to their fullest potentials in our lands and institutions? Have we built our economies to its fullest potentials?

10. Given that some of our Muslim countries are amongst the richest nations in the world today, technically we should not be facing economic, political and social problems as a civilisation. But, the World Bank has classified the 27 member countries of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as low-income countries having per capita income of less than USD765 with the highest poverty and illiteracy rates today. In short, we are dependent on aids and assistance from outside our countries.

11. In such a landscape how can we develop talent, how can we compete with the best and the strongest economies? How can we regain the standing of the Empires of our yesteryears? I hope this Conference will address and resolve to an outcome, some of the questions and issues I have posed.

#### The State of Reality

12. With a few exceptions, the majority of Muslim countries are known to invest reservedly in education of the future. Our focus should not just be to provide education and have higher institutions. The drive must be to build higher institutions comparable to globally renowned ones. The impetus must be to attract the best students, lecturers and researchers from all over the world into our institutions. This is amiss sadly at present in all Muslim countries.

13. We must re-think the syllabus and delivery of our education such that it becomes applicable for today; relevant for our businesses, our industries, for the people. The Research that we do cannot be in isolation of realities of future. The development that we build must be in concert with needs of a society. We cannot build white elephants that serve to waste.

14. At the national level we must enhance the quality of our human capital making their employability attractive and relevant for all times and not just for the times. Our systems and policies must support and reward those who challenge and deliver quality and innovation. It must support the practice of ethics and not quick wins and short term profit maximisation.

15. A society cannot fully progress when parts of it is under qualified and under privileged. It cannot fairly bloom to its fullest potentials, if its people are still illiterate, women not a full participant of society, speech is curbed, access to education is partial and the gap between the have and have-nots are staggeringly wide. The young and youth of our communities must be interested in building our countries. We must retain their talent for the success of our communities and not have them leave to serve another.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

#### Building National Leadership

16. It is rhetorical to even suggest that we live at times when there is no longer a monopoly of knowledge by any one nation, or institution. These are times led by first mover advantage; the best and the finest make it to the finishing line each time and every time.

17. The flat world equipped by technology and driven by movement of human resources across borders has enabled one living in Brazil to offer his/her expertise in Japan. It allows for a technology probably discovered in a small town in Beirut to be reproduced and enhanced in no time in Germany. A period that sees nations' competitiveness defined not by strength of its coffers but also by its policies. This is the era where knowledge rules. Times when thinking leaders will be the drivers of sustainable success at all levels of an economy.

18. The Muslim population is expected to grow from 1.73 billion in 2009 to 1.90 billion by 2015. As a percentage, by 2015 the Muslim population is expected to make up over 26% of the world's population, indicating that Muslims are the fastest growing population globally. In absolute terms, the population in Muslim minority countries such as China and India are growing faster than in Muslim majority countries like Indonesia for instance. Together these two countries will add 162 million Muslims into the market.

19. With such numbers, it is incumbent upon the Ummah, morally, to build successful leaders and communities. Such leadership must emanate from all ranks and files of society. It must span across the width and depth of a nation, enabling individuals and communities to drive success from whatever small thing they do in their daily lives.

20. It can be a janitor, or a school teacher, a clerk, or a public official, a corporate leader, or a politician – all must be incentivised intellectually and morally to deliver leadership even in the smallest of efforts. Each of these efforts when combined will contribute to making a nation enviably competitive.

21. We are starting to see leadership in business activities in Middle East, Asia and Africa in Muslim majority and minority countries. Though we are not there yet, we are seeing rising global brands like the Emirates and Qatar Airlines, Jumeirah in Dubai, Abu Dhabi's Masdar City built on renewable energy principles, Malaysia's Twin Towers and Petronas, Indonesia's and Brunei's rising Halal industries recognised globally.

22. With such population numbers and market opportunities, from a marketing perspective, the Muslim world is on an enviable platform to building a plethora of leading brands and leaders globally. Our competitive advantage will be in us attracting the right investment and talent into our countries and communities and not otherwise.

23. We need to move from being termed as nascent economies to competitive lands that originates and invents. We must be the labels to lands that home the best talents. We must be the countries that ensure prosperity for all and not a selected few. Our communities must have leaders who would dare traditions and confront customs that no longer works.

#### Equitability in Success

24. In seeking success for ourselves, our communities and nation, we must ensure that, success is based on justice and equitability. Events of recent years have proven that success based on greed and callousness can lead to irreparable damage to societies. The rules we apply as Muslims to building success for our nations and communities must be predicated by ethics as conjoined by the Quran and Sunnatul Hadith.

25. Resources planning and development under such a purview is sustainable and equitable. Everyone has a place in the nation's pie of prosperity and no one is left out. No one nation can be fully successful if a part of it is in poverty. Poverty wrecks human capital and competitiveness.

26. We must also be able to discern efficiently and deploy effectively of our resources for optimal outcome and benefit. This resource may include tangible wherewithal such as goods and equipment, financial to human capital. This said, the challenge is not as much in abundance of resources as it is in how the resource is utilised and managed. A resource is as useful as its effective management,

development and deployment. Abundance doesn't mean success anymore.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Malaysian Story

27. Malaysia recognises that the strength of its people will determine its place globally. The Government is investing tremendously in strengthening our education system, and in ensuring our children have access to basic primary, secondary and tertiary education. Malaysia has over 80% literacy rate today and we can do better. There is also much endowment placed in eradicating rural and urban poverty. We are investing in increasing technology penetration rates from the current 25% to 50%. Even so some say we can do better than the 50%.

28. We are working in partnerships with the private sector to improve and ease our business environment through the formation of PEMUDAH, the Special Task Force to Facilitate Business. The Honourable Prime Minister, YAB Dato Sri Mohd Najib Tun Razak, announced the liberalisation of 27 service sectors to attract and enhance foreign direct investment into Malaysia.

29. The Administration has introduced key performance and result areas for all Ministers. This is to strengthen our institutions and to inculcate a culture of accountability, transparency and responsiveness at all levels of government. In the final analysis, Malaysia's significance and relevance is a direct function of its people and the strength of the institutions they make.  
The Story For Us

30. In the age of agriculture, the richest and most developed were those who had vast expanses of land. In the age of industry, the most prosperous and advanced were those who could build factories that could produce the goods that the world hungered for. Both of these eras required extensive capital investment, assembling of raw materials, putting in place the machines, building the disciplined, mass urban industrial workforce and ensuring the necessary hard infrastructure and logistics.

31. The age of hardware and large investments is now substituted by knowledge and intellectual property. The tangibles are replaced by intangible assets. The success of economy in the 21st Century and beyond lies in the strength of its knowledge capital. It is then no wonder that the first verses that came to our Prophet (p.b.u.h) was: "Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created. Created man out of a germ-cell. Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One . Who has taught [man] the use of the pen. Taught man what he did not know. " ( Surah Al Alaq-1-5)

32. Education and knowledge is indisputably the lifeline to human capital development. The awakening of intelligence and the development of latent potential is crucial for Muslim nations to emerge strong again. How we manage the resources given to each of us is not just urgent but of moral importance in our building of the future of the Ummah back to the years of our Empires.

33. If the Muslim countries are willing to stand up and address these issues I spoke about with no reservations and ingenuously, we can lay the groundwork to strong communities, societies, economies and nations. We can compete on par and not by proxy. We can stand on our own terms and with our own originalities. We can see the Golden Age of Islam returning to us again.

34. On that note, and with "Bismillahir rahmanir rahim" I officially declare this conference open.

Thank you.

Wabillahittaufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum  
Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.