

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 23RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
HISTORIANS OF ASIA 2014 (ICHA2014)
24/08/2014**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh,

Salam Sejahtera, Salam 1Malaysia and a very good morning.

1. Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah for His abundant blessings and mercy that have enabled us to gather here for the Opening Ceremony of the 23rd International Conference of Historians of Asia 2014 (IAHA2014).

2. It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to have been invited to the IAHA 2014. It is my pleasure to attend this prestigious gathering of distinguished scholars and Asian history enthusiasts. I am delighted to note that this conference has brought together participants and speakers from various local and international institutions around the world. Thus, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome all international participants and speakers to this conference. Selamat Datang ke Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Over the last 55 years since the inception of IAHA, Malaysia has had the honour of hosting the IAHA Conference three times; twice in Kuala Lumpur and once in Sabah. This is the fourth IAHA conference held in Malaysia and it certainly proves that historians and universities in Malaysia are extremely supportive of, and committed to, IAHA and its noble objectives. I can foresee many more universities in Malaysia playing host to this conference in future.

4. The timely organization of IAHA in August is remarkably significant as Malaysians will celebrate our nation's 57th Independence Day on 31st of August. The events leading to this historical date should not just merely be footnotes in our history books. To show our love for our nation, people from all walks of life especially younger generations must be reminded of the efforts of our past leaders that spearheaded the nation's struggle for independence and the formation of our sovereign state, Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. At the outset, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to University Utara

Malaysia (UUM) and the Malaysian Historical Society for successfully organising this conference. Since its establishment in 1984, UUM has grown into a prominent public university in Malaysia, focusing on studies in business management and other related fields.

6. I would also like to commend Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia or the Malaysian Historical Society the co-organiser of IAHA 2014. It is one of Malaysia's oldest Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Age, however, only seems to rejuvenate it further since the older it gets, the more vigorous it becomes. The study of History is, indeed, invigorating and I must say that I am extremely honoured to have been elected Vice-President of this society.

7. May I also take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers for making the right choice in their selection of Kedah as the venue of this conference. As a state steeped in history, Kedah is certainly the fitting backdrop for deliberations on historical expressions of Asian civilization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I was told that this conference was held in Solo, Indonesia, two years ago. And now top historians of the world gathered again in Southeast Asia. At this juncture, I would like to draw your attention to the archipelagic world of Southeast Asia, a very large world that for a very long time has been treated as marginal to the history of Asia.

9. A greater focus on the history on Archipelagic Southeast Asia is very long overdue. This archipelagic world comprises the modern countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines, and also parts of Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. This archipelagic world belongs to one common ancient civilisation. After Solo, Kedah should reinforce interest in this archipelagic world, and historians who are native to the Archipelago should take the lead in carrying out studies and investigations, either individually or collectively.

10. Naturally, the history of Malaysia will be seen strongly in its natural civilisational setting, the Malay Archipelago. This is because history is the understanding of the developments of an indigenous civilisation in its native world. We will not be able to appreciate history properly if it is restrained by political borders of modern constructs. History is one of the knowledge disciplines that are requisite for the understanding of a modern country and its nation building efforts.

11. History and the wider social sciences will thus be given the proper emphasis in Malaysia as the development of the country will need to be guided by the proper

philosophical and historical traditions. In this regard, the Ministry of Education provides various scholarships for students to pursue their education in history and the social sciences at established academic centres of excellence, both local and abroad, and students of history education can be recruited into positions in the various government sectors and agencies. History should be not only an academic career, but also one that is able to serve national life and it is apt to proclaim that IAHA 2014 will therefore be an extra impetus to the pursuit of the study of what one might call a revitalised history in Malaysia.

12. This reaffirmation of the importance of history is being undertaken in the context of a comprehensive review of the Malaysian education system. Malaysia is embarking on a visionary education plan that is comprehensively described in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 that covers pre-school to post-secondary education. This education blueprint addresses not only the issue of imparting conventional knowledge to the young, but also of uplifting ethics and spirituality, and consciousness of a national identity in our very own process of on going project of Nation Building.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. Nationhood is a project started when we gained our independence from the British in 1957. Nationhood project started at the same time. Eight years later we saw the formation of Malaysia. Through the years, the multiethnic nature of the country provides for the sharing of experience, culture, religion and even food. However, while we have the structure and paraphernalia of a State, we are still working towards a nationhood. The sense of belonging and appreciation of ones differences and similarities must be present in the hearts of all before we become a nation. The knowledge in humanities subject such as history, philosophy, literature, mass communication, fine arts and social sciences subjects like Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Economics and Geography among others are key to assist in strengthening our society as Malaysians. Amongst these subjects, history and philosophy provide the strongest background and foundational knowledge in this process of nation building.

14. Universities for instance, might have to look at the possibility of embedding programs that will allow our students and citizens to understand and appreciate more on our history by either strengthening and enhancing our existing social sciences and liberal arts program or introducing new related programs such as philosophy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. As a country modernises, it develops in all fields such as architecture, the arts,

education, sports, science and engineering. The history of the country should be well researched and its content should be the inspiration for the development of these aforementioned fields. In this regards, modernisation should be leveraged as a push factor to ensure History as a discipline remain to be relevant if not increased in values and demand. While history is already a compulsory for students of social science, however, very often historians teach the subject as a subject of the “past”, about the “past” and for the “past”. Consequently, history is not perceived as having values in the current fast moving, dynamic and vibrant society. Thus, students, for example, do not see the “future” of the subject. For this reason, there is a need for reviewing and reorienting the pedagogy of the subject into a live “subject” with an approach that emphasizes on the grand statement that “the future lies in the past”.

16. The Ministry of Education will develop strategies towards these objectives both in schools and universities which include how to increase the connectivity among the social sciences subject and also developing the bridge between social sciences and the hard and pure science subjects. At the same time, to provide broader governance framework for the stronger contribution of social sciences subject which definitely include history, the proposal of the establishment of the Social Science Academy will be expedited.

17. In other words, applied history should be an essential element in the planning and implementation of national policy in all fields. In this manner, the indigenous civilisation and culture will be kept alive, and consequently, so will creativity and diversity, which are the hallmarks of the development of human society.

18. Even matters of international relations among countries could resort to history, for instance, in the resolution of conflicts. In Asia, not least in Southeast Asia, territorial conflicts for instance, should make reference to the historical past, so that the probability of past realities would enlighten us and help us in the effort to find the best solutions. Matters regarding the movement of people and of labour between countries, for instance, should make reference to their history so that these human phenomena can be better understood, and hence better managed in the spirit of history. Perhaps this conference would be able to get the interest in Applied History started. At the end of this gathering, it is very likely that the historians of Asia will ponder on how to make history a significant matter in Asia, and for us here in Southeast Asia.

Ladies and Gentlemen

19. Malaysia will be the Chair of ASEAN Community in 2015. The history of ASEAN is well documented. In our role as Chair, we recognize that we must play a strong role to develop all three pillars of the Community. While strong attention has been given to the

ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Political Security Community, minimal attention has been given to the ASEAN Social Cultural Community. Social cultural problems are abound within ASEAN. Malaysia can take the lead here on issues of human trafficking, domestic violence and the environment and international relations. Scholars of Social sciences and humanities must play a strong role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. Finally I would like to once again congratulate the organising committee for their hard work and sacrifices in putting together an international conference for the benefits of the scholarly community working on an important front in human development. Your commitment and efforts in making this conference a success are greatly appreciated.

21. I would also like to convey our sincere and deep appreciation to all speakers, presenters and participants of the conference for their contributions of intellectual and constructive elements that will be the focus of the deliberations in this conference. I am confident that all of you will have a successful and fruitful deliberation of minds, not to mention an enjoyable stay here in the state of Kedah.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. On that positive note and in the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, it now gives me great pleasure to declare the 23rd International Conference of Historians of Asia 2014 (IAHA2014) officially open.

Thank you.

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