



MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

WELCOMING REMARKS

by

YB DATO' SERI DIRAJA DR. ZAMBRY ABD KADIR
MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION MALAYSIA

in conjunction with the

OPENING CEREMONY

of the

TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION ASIA UNIVERSITY
SUMMIT 2024

themed

“BRIDGING FRONTIERS: CHANGING THE
LANDSCAPE OF EDUCATION IN ASIA”

| 29 April 2024 | JC1, Sunway University, Sunway City |

SALUTATIONS

(To be advised on the day of the event)

Assalamualaikum WBT, Salam Hormat, Salam Malaysia
MADANI.

INTRODUCTION: THE TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION ASIA UNIVERSITIES SUMMIT 2024

1. I extend my sincere gratitude to the organizers, Times Higher Education, and our gracious host, Sunway University, for the opportunity to deliver the welcoming remarks today.
2. It is indeed an honor to address such a distinguished gathering of leaders from across the higher education ecosystem in Asia. I was informed that we have over 600 delegates representing more than 160 organizations from 40 nations attending this Summit. This impressive turnout underscores the shared belief in education as a powerful unifier, equalizer, and catalyst for progress.

3. To our esteemed international guests, welcome to Malaysia, or as we say in Bahasa Malaysia, "Selamat Datang". Whether you're here for the first time or returning, I invite you to immerse yourself in our hospitality. Explore the diverse flavors of Malaysian cuisine and experience the hospitality extended to you throughout your stay.

BRIDGING FRONTIERS: CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF EDUCATION IN ASIA

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen,

4. Over the next few days, numerous discussions will unfold regarding the role of universities in fostering collaboration among academia, industry, and communities. Of particular significance are deliberations on rankings and their function in stimulating competition and providing students with guidance in their educational pursuits.

5. Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) recognizes the indispensable role of rankings in our

higher education ecosystem, as they promote competition and continuous improvement. Rankings foster innovation and research, nurturing vibrant academic communities. They serve as benchmarks, indicating where universities stand in comparison to their peers regionally and globally. Moreover, subject rankings facilitate enhanced research collaborations and partnerships. The visibility and recognition afforded to younger universities, many of which are concentrated in Asia, are definite advantages.

6. However, it is imperative for MOHE to strike a delicate balance. We should strive for a holistic view of higher education and avoid being preoccupied with rankings alone.

7. We must prioritize our students' well-being, ensuring that our universities focus on:

(a) Talent development, with an emphasis on values and humanity, ensuring our graduates

are future-ready through continuous updating of teaching materials and knowledge.

(b) Publication within the expertise of lecturers/academic fraternity to avoid publication retractions.

(c) Avoidance of publishing in predatory journals, which often stems from pressure to fulfil/maintain rankings.

(d) Evidence-based, ethically impactful research prioritized for societal development.

(e) Alignment of university ranking indicators with local context and Malaysia's aspirations for future development, particularly MADANI aspirations.

(f) Research outcomes addressing societal well-being and nation-building needs.

In essence, educators must prioritize top-quality teaching and learning experiences alongside impactful research and publication outcomes beneficial to society.

8. Reflecting on Harry Lewis's book "Excellence without a Soul," amidst the rapid evolution of higher education, we must not neglect the holistic development of individuals—their spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions. The saying of Muslim Scholar Saidina Ali resonates: "If you want to see the future of a nation, look at its youth today." This underscores the importance of nurturing knowledge and character in our higher education institutions.

9. While our universities undoubtedly produce high achievers across various fields, it is crucial to ponder their motivations. Are their endeavors purely driven by capitalistic pursuits, or do they serve a greater communal and higher purpose? This includes ensuring equity, opportunities for disadvantaged students, and support for those facing family

hardships. I hope these questions are thoroughly explored and addressed throughout this Summit.

LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

10. This Summit is aptly themed “***Bridging Frontiers: Changing the Landscape of Education in Asia***”. As the global higher education landscape is faced with new challenges but also great opportunities. This includes a growing appetite for international students to seek meaningful educational opportunities, the ability to learn, work, and develop intellectually and professionally in a foreign country. This includes communities looking to universities to create vibrancy within their cities and towns; and this includes businesses looking to hire top talent in an increasingly competitive global market to provide the best services, products, and innovations. We are not deny the ranking status but at the same time we don't want to be “isomorphic mimicry”. “Isomorphic mimicry” which is simply

imitating what is made by the other community, putting 'form over function'. We want original excellence that has an impact, solves problems that are used not just chasing the rating ladder without providing original benefits, especially to our country.

11. Whether these opportunities are fully embraced or not, **university leaders play a defining role**: Many of you here today who are in position to steer your ships forward, will need to embrace competition by building bridges, and break down silos and dividing walls. My question to all the leaders here today: ***Will you be able to lead strategically while also setting the moral compass for your followers?***

12. I would be remiss if I did not mention that all these opportunities exist against the backdrop of recent global challenges. This includes:

(a) Post-COVID-19 efforts. Let us not forget that many of our incoming students are those who

were locked down during their secondary school years, and they enter university with renewed hope, optimism, but also a sense of trepidation of the unknown. Some even have learning gaps which need to be bridged, so universities must think of fundamentals alongside the more advanced education they usually deliver.

(b) Second, let us not forget that the world today is a more complex place. **According to the World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2024**, in the next 2 years, the top global risks include: misinformation and disinformation, extreme weather events, societal polarization, cyber insecurity, interstate armed conflict, lack of economic opportunity and more.

So, a key question is: **How will universities in Asia respond?**

13. In this regard, I would like to address a contemporary issue that is presently unfolding. We

see in the US, students protesting the ongoing war in Gaza which has been prolonged and exacerbated by war mongers. Students from many institutions, including top ones such as Harvard and Columbia, have taken to the streets to protest the atrocities that have led to an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis as well as demanding that their universities cut financial ties and divest from companies enabling the brutality.

14. This goes back to my earlier point: There are many challenges we face, and we cannot shy away from what's happening on the ground. **As we discuss “bridging frontiers”, it is these emerging landscapes that we must address if universities are to remain at the forefront of the development of leaders, individuals, societies and civilisations.** If we choose to close our eyes, then universities risk being alienated from the realities of the world we live in today – is this something we are willing to accept or compromise?

CONCLUSION

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen,

15. Before I conclude, I would like to address several points regarding the advancement of quality education in a country like Malaysia.

(a) Firstly, the transformative power of education for good cannot be underestimated. As a graduate of a local university (IIUM), I stand before you today thanks to the government's investment in my education. It is imperative that we ensure access to education for all.

(b) Secondly, we must nurture talent that is future-proof. Our Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim, has emphasized the need for future-proof talent that is competent, committed, and confident in facing the chaotic, complex, and contradictory world. I am confident that our universities can play a significant role in this endeavor.

- (c) Thirdly, we must play a role in protecting our planet and the world. We need to ensure that knowledge on sustainability, planetary health, and regenerative economies is integrated into our education system. The climate emergency is real, and action must be taken. We must continue to prioritize discussions on this matter.

- (d) Fourthly, we need to harness the power of collaboration and partnerships. The most competitive institutions are those that excel in collaboration. There is immense synergistic and mutualistic benefit to be gained from sharing knowledge, experiences, and resources. I commend Sunway University and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for their landmark partnership to establish and deliver the Sunway University Medical Doctor program. This partnership serves as an exemplary model of how public-private partnerships are essential for innovation and advancement.

(e) Lastly, Malaysia can become an international hub for higher education, fostering economic prosperity, social progress, and peace. Malaysia is a unique country, home to numerous international campuses and hundreds of thousands of international alumni. Despite our challenges, Malaysia is a global gateway, built on unity in diversity. Therefore, Malaysia can play a pivotal role as a global education influencer for a better future for all.

16. On behalf of MOHE, I extend my congratulations to the organizers, Times Higher Education and Sunway University, for bringing together such a distinguished group of intellectuals for this Summit. I express gratitude to the supporters and sponsors for their belief in this cause. I anticipate that the discourse over the next few days will be enlightening, and I eagerly await the outcomes. The Ministry fully supports the agenda of a truly global and interconnected higher education.

With that, I thank you very much.

Assalamualaikum WBT.