



MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**CLOSING SPEECH
YB. DATO' SERI DIRAJA DR. ZAMBRY ABD KADIR
MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**FOR:
ENGAGEMENT SESSION WITH YB MENTERI PENDIDIKAN
TINGGI BERSEMPENA WORLD CONFERENCE ON
ISLAMIC THOUGHT & CIVILIAN 2024 (WCIT 2024)
“TOGETHER WE STAND: MUSLIMS AND GLOBAL
HUMANITY”**

**DATE | TIME:
28TH JULY 2024 (SUNDAY) | 07:30 PM**

**VENUE:
Casuarina Hotel, Meru, Ipoh, Perak**

1. Assalamualaikum wbt and very good evening, and a heartfelt welcome to each and every one of you to this special welcoming dinner. It is an absolute honor and privilege to be here with such a distinguished gathering of scholars and passionate advocates for global humanity.
2. As we come together tonight, we celebrate not only our shared commitment to addressing the pressing issues facing humanity today, but also the diverse perspective and experiences that each one of you brings to this conference.
3. Your presence has underscored the importance of collaboration and dialogue in our collective efforts to foster a more just, equitable and compassionate world.\
4. And I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to this Royal Highness Sultan of Perak for consenting to continue this WCIT gathering until today, since its starting 7 years ago.
5. Special thanks also go to the organizer USAS (Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah), the organizing committee and volunteers whose hard work and dedication have made this conference possible.

Understanding The Nature of Global Challenges to Chart For The Future

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Before moving forward, I think it is very important for us to ‘make sense’ of what’s going on today, to understand the nature of global challenges which in my view, become ‘inescapable realities’. I would like to single out three realities in the current landscape:
7. First, we have witnessed the conflict and wars unfolded in Gaza – the worst case of genocide in modern history. The war itself has generated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, not to mention the death of non-combatants, women and children, the elders. This war, whether it is happening in Gaza, Ukraine or anywhere else in the world, generate unimaginable consequences – from psychological trauma to humanitarian crisis, displacement to radicalisation, regional conflict to spillover effect globally.
8. Following this human catastrophic unfolding in Gaza, Philippe Lazzarini Chief of UN Relief Agency (UNRWA) states “the world is losing humanity”.
9. In facing this reality, I don’t think we should stand aimlessly and doing nothing. We have to ask ourselves - how can we play our role positively in this conflict and war? What is the wisdom, contained in our tradition, the religious teachings such as our

truth of Islamic thought, that we have, can be utilised to deal with the current realities?

10. This means our intellectuals and scholars must have a grasp of the current realities of global politics, the sinister games of geopolitics, while at the same time, having a deep understanding and root in our tradition.
11. Second, we are also witnessing the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that is bound to change the global landscape now and in future. AI technology is gathering its momentum now and of course it become a cause of concern today.
12. In 2021, Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, co-authored a book with Eric Schmidt (former CEO of Google) and Daniel Huttenlocher (Dean at MIT) entitled *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future*. In this book, they concluded as follows:

“To some degree, we three differ in the extent to which we are optimistic about AI. But we agree the technology is changing human thought, knowledge, perception, and reality — and, in so doing, changing the course of human history. In this book, we have sought neither to celebrate AI nor to bemoan it. Regardless of feeling, it is becoming ubiquitous.”

13. The AI's presence is an unescapable reality, or in the word of Kissinger is 'ubiquitous' – exist and present everywhere. It is and will be even more in future. The question is – how can we deal with this reality? Definitely we are not going to go against it, we are going to ride the wave of AI! But how can we ride it, or benefit from it without compromising humanity, our values, our identity. Because AI technology has the potential to take over human role – AI has capability to 'make decision' for human being. In more practical sense, we have to ask ourselves, 'are we going to surrender human power to AI to make decision for us?'
14. With AI technology, the machine can prioritise, choose and make decision for us in many things, including in religious affairs, if we allow them to. Thus, in future, don't be surprised if we see AI can take over the job of a mufti to give fatwa on legal rulings. In AI world, human become slave to machine. The machine that we as human has created. That's the tragedy of a postmodern.
15. Third, it is also important for us, in the postmodern age, to reflect deeply upon the real purpose of education. In 1995, an American educator Neil Postman published a book *The End of Education*. Therein, he gave us a chilling observation that:

‘The current crisis in our educational system derives from its failure to supply students with a translucent, unifying "narrative" like those that inspired earlier generations. Instead, today's schools promote the false "gods" of economic utility, consumerism, or ethnic separatism and resentment.’

16. His concern was again echoed by Harry R. Lewis, Dean of Harvard College who wrote a book Excellence Without A Soul in 2006, examining the state of American higher education, with particular reference to Harvard.
17. And the latest work by Harvard Professor, Howard Gardner and Wendy Fischman, The Real World of College, how Harvard suffering from HED Capital (Higher Education Capital). Intellectual capital – knowledge skills, critical thinking, ability to ask question and make connection.
18. Gardner sorted out undergraduates who are:
 - a. Inertial (you go to high school, then you go to college, on autopilot);
 - b. Transactional (you do what's required to get a degree, then go to work or graduate school);
 - c. Exploratory (you go to college for a one-time opportunity to try something new or to dabble in a new field);
 - d. Transformational (you go to college to examine your fundamental beliefs and values).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Creating a knowledge-based society is paramount in today's world in the Islamic world for example, knowledge is very central in Muslim life. In fact, knowledge served as a foundation of civilization. This is evident in Muslim civilization. The Golden Age of Islam, as we call it, was known for its growth of knowledge, scientific discoveries, great libraries such as Darul Hikmah in Baghdad. And the downfall of knowledge, education, university and research spell the end of civilization.
20. Great civilization emerges where there is education institution. Before, we have seen 'Darul Hikmah', the great library, university and college, existed in Muslim empire, in Baghdad. Now, this education moved to the West.

Malaysia Higher Education System

21. Malaysia has long recognized the transformative power of education. The nation's higher education system is committed to not only imparting academic knowledge but also fostering values and skills essential for nurturing global citizens. Some of the key initiatives and efforts that underscore Malaysia's dedication to this cause.
 - a. Internationalization of Education:

Malaysia has made substantial investments in the internationalization of its higher education sector. By welcoming students from all corners of the globe, Malaysian universities have created a vibrant multicultural environment. This exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives enriches the educational

experience, promoting cross-cultural understanding and empathy among students.

b. Inclusive Education Policies:

Malaysia is committed ensuring that education is accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic background. Scholarships and financial aid programs are in place to support deserving students, enabling them to pursue higher education. This inclusivity is fundamental to creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to contribute to global humanity.

c. Emphasis on Soft Skills and Ethical Values:

The Malaysian higher education curriculum places significant emphasis on the development of soft skills and ethical values. Students are encouraged to engage

in community service, leadership programs and ethical decision-making courses. These experiences instill a sense of social responsibility and prepare graduates to be conscientious global citizens.

d. Focus on Sustainable Development:

Malaysia's higher education institutions are at the forefront of promoting sustainable development. Through specialized programs and initiatives, students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to tackle environmental challenges and contribute to a sustainable future. This commitment aligns with the global agenda of achieving the United Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

e. Promoting Peace and Social Cohesion:

Malaysia diverse society serves as a living laboratory for promoting peace and social cohesion. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering dialogue and understanding among different ethnic and religious groups. By championing inclusivity and tolerance, Malaysia sets an example for global humanity.

22. In conclusion, education is not merely a tool for personal or professional advancement; it is the cornerstone of global humanity. In closing, I extend my deepest gratitude to all of you for your participation and dedication to this noble cause. Together, we stand as a testament to the power of unity and the enduring spirit of global humanity.

23. May this conference be a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change. Let us move forward with a shared vision and a steadfast commitment to making the world a better place for all through the transformative power of education.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the evening.

Wabillahi Taufik Wal Hidayah, Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh