

OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH BY

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It is my honour and pleasure to be with all of you today to officiate the Malaysian Chapter of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a network that aims to mobilize key scientific and technical knowledge to support solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues.

Sustainable development is at the core of the global development agenda. Today's world is fraught with challenges on an unprecedented scale. With the global population expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050, the challenges we will face in the future will be further amplified. We can expect an increasingly competitive global environment, where only the most highly skilled and educated will succeed. We can expect a more uncertain world, characterized by economic instability, conflict and increased frequency and severity of natural disasters. We will live in a world where meeting our needs will require innovative solutions to these challenges.

Equipping ourselves with the tools necessary to meet these daunting challenges will determine our quest towards maintaining and improving our well-being.

Malaysia is not sheltered from the challenges faced globally. While we are making great strides in meeting our development goals, we will have to respond to the emerging challenges that we face today. Not only do we need to respond to these challenges, but we must find solutions that both enhance and sustain our well-being as well as a model that ensures no groups will be marginalised in achieving our aims.

As we strive to become a developed nation by 2020, we must move towards a balanced model of development that meets the increasing aspirations of the nation and its entire people. The New Economic Model, a framework for transforming Malaysia from a middle income to an advanced nation by 2020, recognises this need by identifying sustainability and inclusiveness as the goals to achieve our overall aims. It recognises that achieving a high income status on its own would not deliver the desired outcomes. We need to achieve a high income status for the benefit of all, and that can be sustained for generations to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, how, then do we achieve these seemingly contradicting goals? Can technology solve all our worries? Will regulatory frameworks drive the change needed? Will financial instruments give birth to innovative solutions from the industry? The answer, I believe, is both none and all of them at the same time.

We cannot rely on a silver bullet to solve such a complex challenge. Technology alone will be of no use without the human and financial capability to utilize it. Regulatory frameworks can drive change, though they can go only so far in providing the enabling conditions. And financial instruments are useless if they do not allow for technological solutions and cause the desired behavioural change.

However, this is not to say that these mechanisms will not contribute to sustainable development. Rather, the opposite. However, these mechanisms, and others, will have to be seen as one. In other words, a vital component of finding solutions to these complex challenges is the ability to think holistically. This sits at the heart of sustainable development where challenges are interlinked with one another, requiring solutions that look at the bigger picture.

But then the next question we have to ask ourselves is how do we apply holistic thinking? This, in itself, is a major challenge. The answer though, I believe, lies in education.

The Malaysian school curriculum is committed to developing the child holistically along intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions, as reflected in the National Education Philosophy. This philosophy was embedded in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which offers a vision of the education system and students that Malaysia both needs and deserves.

Our philosophy is to encourage, holistic, well-rounded personal growth. We believe this philosophy will embed 21st Century Skills to meet the 21st Century challenges that we face. We go beyond academic components of education and include extra school curriculum activities to provide impetus on personal development as much as academic development. I believe that this will help students to develop the skills necessary with regards to sustainability. Skills such as the ability to understand complexity, to think in an interdisciplinary way, participation in decision-making processes, and leadership skills that are instilled into the students through this model.

I am also proud to say that our higher education institutions have also shown various examples of where holistic and integrated research has been applied, of which I'm sure you will hear about more over the course of this event. This is a testament to the philosophy of education in this country.

Ladies and gentlemen, our higher education institutions play a vital role in the search for solutions to sustainable development. The institutions are not only places where knowledge is gained, but they are also at the forefront of generating and creating new knowledge. Universities are central to bring about sustainable development to the nation.

I think we can all agree that high-quality research will aid us to find solutions to the challenges we face. With world class facilities available in Malaysia, our universities are well placed to deliver world-class research on the most critical issues. Furthermore, as a multicultural country with an abundance of natural resources, Malaysia is a living lab for studying some of the key themes of sustainable development. We have the enviable situation where we can study first-hand the relationship between human and nature, which is one of the key themes of sustainable development.

Universities have the chance to lead the sustainable development agenda in the nation and become role models by embracing the principles of sustainable development. I am very impressed with some of our universities sustainable campus efforts, showing examples of how sustainable living can be implemented and at the same time educating their students and the wider community. These practices are highly encouraging and act as a model where the universities go beyond academic pursuits but also as a place that contributes to the wider society.

Ultimately, the higher education institutions develop highly skilled individuals that are involved in some of the most critical aspects of sustainable development challenges including socio-economic and

environmental challenges. They undertake highly respected research and provide conducive environments that give birth to innovation. The universities foster responsible citizens and fashion future leaders.

The complexity of the challenges provides even more of an emphasis on the need for interdisciplinary solutions. Universities are well-placed to deal with the complexity of these interlinked challenges, perhaps more so than any other part of the society. Questions such as the link between health and environmental degradation, energy, food and water security, the impacts of urbanization and so on are best addressed by bringing together multiple disciplines. Universities can provide the focal point that brings together the different ways of thinking and different schools of thought.

I think we can all agree that higher education institutions play a vital role in solving the multifaceted sustainable development issues. Universities as a place of teaching, research as well as society's agent of change provide all the necessary enabling conditions to lead the nation towards a path of sustainability and efforts such as today's SDSN Malaysia Chapter launch are a testament to that.

Ladies and gentlemen, while I genuinely believe our higher education institutions has a unique opportunity to play a leading role in our aspiration to move towards a sustainable path to development, translating the knowledge gained and generated in universities into tangible actions on the ground will require multiple actors to be involved. There is not one part of society that can solve these challenges on their own.

Knowledge does not reside only in universities. Industries and businesses have the technical knowledge that is a vital component of sustainable development. Indigenous and local communities have knowledge that has been passed on from generations that may be highly relevant to some of the challenges faced, especially within their own communities. Non-Governmental Organisations also gained applied knowledge to some of the most pressing sustainable development challenges.

Furthermore, many of these actors are both the users of knowledge and implementers of solutions. Businesses are at the forefront of delivering technology, including those that are directly related to solving the key challenges. NGOs have tremendous experience in providing actions and solutions to some of the most pressing problems.

I believe establishing smart partnerships with the different actors is vital towards generating and implementing solutions. In fact, in Malaysia's Education Blueprint, we put emphasis on partnering with the private sector and communities as well as NGOs as a model that can contribute towards the development of the student.

Mobilizing the different knowledge holders and actors can be a powerful tool in developing action-oriented solutions. I therefore commend and fully support the establishment and the efforts by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. I believe this is an extremely important and timely initiative as we move from understanding the challenges of sustainable development towards finding solutions that will contribute towards responding to those challenges.

If the Network can leverage on each of the actors strengths, I believe it can be a successful model for linking knowledge to action. The time has come for solutions and actions to be based on knowledge to ensure that best practices are implemented. I believe the network can deliver knowledge-based, integrated and action-oriented solutions that can provide positive contribution towards the society.

In an increasingly interconnected world, it is also pleasing to see global networks that utilise our interconnectedness towards the aim of problem solving of some of the most critical issues we face. I believe the SDSN can be an important platform for both Malaysia to learn solutions from other platforms, as well as sharing our solutions to the rest of the world. With sustainable development embedded in our development policies, I hope the Malaysia Chapter will elevate Malaysia as a leading player in developing sustainable development solutions in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, education is the bedrock of development. In our aspirations to move towards a knowledge based economy, I would like to emphasise the importance of education in achieving our sustainable development goals. As we move away from a resource intensive economy, important cognitive skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving skills will be essential. A knowledge based economy will not only move Malaysia up the value chain but also ensure we use fewer resources to fuel our economy.

I am also elated that many of the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) are in harmony with the key strategic shifts of the National Education Blueprint (NEB) which focuses on transforming education in our nation. For example shift 3 is committed to creating a society of tomorrow which is rooted in positive value based characteristics. Empowerment is another shared vision that SDSN and NEB have in common. We both agree that when empowered, stakeholders have the ability to raise the bar of performance and actualize success. In fact, shifts 4 to 9 are all some form of empowerment to strengthen a stakeholder to benefit the vision of the whole. Shift 10 is also a shared platform between the SDSN and the NEB. We both prioritize the optimization of resources in order to achieve sustainable and consistent success. Finally the 11th shift is in tangent with SDSN in making accountability a cornerstone in the journey towards a paradigm shift in the fields we seek to transform. These shared values will go a long way in increasing cooperation and ideas towards creating a synergy that will not only benefit our nation but the globe along with it.

The Millennium Development Goals have guided the global agenda on education for many developing countries. As we look forward to 2015 when the MDGs come to an end, any Post 2015 development framework must ensure the inclusion of education in a way that is relevant to all countries and takes into account the different educational needs of different countries. I believe education should be of key importance in any post-2015 framework and it should address not only access to education, but go beyond, and include issues such as equity, lifelong learning and quality of education.

Ladies and gentlemen, on that note, and with great pleasure, I hereby launch the Malaysian Chapter of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Thank you for your attention and may God bless you.