

**Seminar on “The Rise of Smart Society and the Role of Islam in
Navigating Civilisational Renewal”
(IAIS Malaysia, 13 November 2018)**

*Speech by YB Dato’ Dr. Mujahid Yusof Rawa
Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department in charge of Religious Affairs*

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning,

Prof Mohammad Hashim Kamali, members of IAIS Board of Directors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be with you in today’s inaugural IAIS’ 10th Anniversary. I am pleased to say that I have always believed that Islamic think tanks such as IAIS Malaysia have a crucial role in the progress of Muslims and society at large. Under its current leadership, IAIS Malaysia in the last ten years has been actively producing high-quality Islamic scholarships and an exemplary advocate for critical and constructive engagements within the society.
2. I could not emphasise more the important work that IAIS Malaysia as an Islamic think tank has been doing. Especially in today’s society and climate where Islam is often associated with totalitarianism, anti-democracy, or even worse, violence and extremism. Here in Malaysia, the Muslim community is witnessing polarising opinions on the role of Islam in many key areas—ranging from economy and finance, cultural and inter-ethnic relations, and especially in politics and governance. It is essential that Islamic think tanks such as this Institute offer rigorous, balanced and genuine Islamic inputs on such matters, and become a reliable source of reference for the public.
3. Against this backdrop, IAIS has shown unrelenting efforts and an enduring commitment towards serving the Muslim *ummah* under the theme of civilisational renewal. Since its inception in 2008, IAIS Malaysia has become a key institution that provides policy advice through its regular Policy Issue Papers (PIP), Policy Issue Briefs (PIB), and high profile Roundtable Discussions (RTD). Also, through its regular colloquia, seminars and public

outreach programmes, this Institute plays an active role in bridging between different segments of society on various—and sometimes sensitive—issues in a reciprocal and respectful atmosphere. This is of critical importance in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like ours.

Distinguished guests,

4. In a famous Arabic adage, it is said that we must prepare our younger generations to face challenges of the future that might not be the same as that of ours:

لا تجبروا أولادكم على آدابكم فإنهم مخلوقون لزمان غير زمانكم

Do not force your children to your etiquette, they are created for a time other than your time

This is especially true now. I believe we can easily remember that around ten years ago, our mobiles phones have smaller screens and have very limited functions. It only took a decade since 2007, when the first iPhone was released, that phones now have larger screens, and have become our GPS navigator, personal camera, digital wallet, gaming device, social and political platform, educational tool and even our source of livelihood.

5. In the age of rapid change and advanced technology, the economic landscape is not the only aspect that has evolved. It has also changed the society. For instance, the proliferation of social media platforms and mobile technology have radically changed the way people see the world and interact with each other, and this, in turn, presents a new set of challenges to the previous ways things are being done. The use of new technologies has permeated all spheres of public life—from finance, economy, politics, law, health, education, and even religion. These include relatively new and yet to be fully explored technologies and concepts such as Big Data, Blockchain technology, Artificial intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), Internet of Things (IoT), intelligent robots, and the shared economy. In this highly connected society, where both information and assets are stored in the virtual world and transferred at great speeds, we will inevitably grapple with more problems that are commonly characterised by the VUCA term; Volatile, Unpredictable, Complex and Ambiguity.
6. This advanced, technology-centred, fast-paced, and interconnected society are the defining characteristics of a ‘Smart Society’. First originated

from Japan, the term ‘Smart Society 5.0’ is currently used to describe the current progression of society since the Hunting Society (Society 1.0), the Agrarian Society (Society 2.0), the Industrial Society (Society 3.0), and the Information Society (Society 4.0).

7. In the advent of this futuristic ‘Smart Society’, discourses now revolve around globalism and climate change, renewable energy and sustainability, space exploration and settlement, self-autonomous machines and vehicles, complexity and systemic thinking as well as decentralisation of institutions and governance. All these will certainly alter the ways people live and interact hence instigate more complex and hard-to-solve moral and legal predicaments.
8. Against these fast shifting world and paradigms, Islam must maintain its relevance and offer solutions and guidance best-suited to its time. These are the challenges that Islamic think tanks like IAIS, and all of us, must tackle to offer relevant Islamic insights and moral guidance to society at large.

Distinguished guests,

9. In our efforts to offer Islamic solutions to problems of the future and other modern challenges, there must be an equally strong will to understand and acknowledge the relevance of context and societal reality in which we try to address. While Islamic teachings and principles are timeless and constant, the people and society always change in line with the progressions of technology, cultural norms, and methods of governance. Understanding these contextual dynamics enables us to apply the divine principles of the Lawgiver in more effective ways and avoid false prescriptions of shariah Laws. Only then, the full potential of shariah can be unlocked, and become what the Quran terms as “*rahmatan lil Alamin*” (a blessing to all).
10. In the context of our beloved Malaysia, there are pressing needs to re-evaluate what are the current realities, and what has changed. In the course of history, Malaysia’s political structure has shifted from having multiple sovereign Malay states ruled under multiple Sultanates (*Kerajaan Beraja*) to form a federation based on a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary system. Consequently, after a long process of inter-ethnic bargaining, cooperation and consensus, the Federal Constitution was ratified, and has now become the Supreme law in the country that binds all Malaysians. In this Constitution, the position of Islam is enshrined, while granting equal

rights and status to all Malaysians regardless of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. This, however, does not delegitimise affirmative action policies that were put in place to redress existing inequalities resulting from the past. Therefore, any reform or *islah* must always take into consideration this national framework. One should not simply imitate or transplant models from foreign soils or paradigms belonging to a different time. This is the approach that I have been referring to as *fiqh al-siyasi al-maliziy*, a context-bound implementation of Islamic prescriptions that caters to current local needs and demands.

11. We Malaysians are blessed with our diversity and multicultural society. To move forward, there is no other viable and sustainable way, other than to move together. This path has been time-tested from time to time, and lessons from history have shown us that it is not possible nor favourable to only cater to one segment of society—if one hopes for a stable, peaceful and sustainable nation. It is unimaginable that the shariah would be in opposition to this ideals, and not in consonance with such vision of unity and harmony, even if it involves safeguarding the Islamic faith (*hifz al-din*).
12. In this context, a holistic and wholesome understanding of *Maqasid al-Shariah* and its correct application (*taf'il*) will offer Islamic guidance that is not only relevant but universally insightful. Having a dual mastery on the higher purposes (*maqasid*) of the Lawgiver, and its intended policy applications (*siyasah al-shar'iyah*), will enable us to minimise error in formulating Islamic policies that are based on passion rather than shariah principles and laws. This henceforth promotes a more purposeful, informed, and balanced policy decisions. This can be reflected in various issues such as a balanced implementation of Islamic law in its punishment and rehabilitation; an equitable Islamic economy that accommodates growth yet socially responsible; adopting an inclusive yet principled approach when dealing with inter-ethnic relations; and having a high degree of openness without sacrificing critical thought when interacting with new ideas and values.
13. Braving the future not only requires us to have the knowledge and mastery, but also to possess the readiness to engage and have meaningful dialogues with other civilisations and cultures. This is part and parcel of the Islamic mission to spread its positive message and ideals to the world. This is the real definition of Islam as a blessing for all (*rahmatan lil alamin*). To achieve this, it is vital that we shift our reactionary and combative mindset to a more

accommodating and embracing position. Only then, we can engage and learn from other cultures, religions and civilisations. This is in line with the Quran injunction when it uses the term “*li taa’rafu*” in the verse (Q. al-Hujurat, 49:13):

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another

14. Also in pursuit of the spirit of “*li taa’rafu*”, is the willingness to listen seriously to a range of views despite how wrong or strange and even obnoxious it may sound and then proceed to share our own views intelligibly and persuasively. While different context and different situations require varied responses, lessons from our Prophet Muhammad (pubh) illustrates that Islam promotes persuasion rather than manipulation or coercion. This advocacy for dialogue and willingness to engage in a balanced and moderate manner is the embodiment of the true spirit of Islamic da‘wah and the path that we should strive towards.
15. In conclusion, envisioning a future for Malaysia under the fold of Islam requires that we appeal to diversity and respect differences. This however, doesn’t mean that we should abandon our strongly-held Islamic values and belief, but rather, that we should articulate them in a reasonable manner that is fully cognisant and aware of the Malaysian realities (*fiqh al-maliziyy*), the *maqasid al-shariah*, and a more accommodating and compassionate approach (*rahmatan lil alamin*).
16. Overall, I am pleased with the role and healthy platform that IAIS has provided throughout the last ten years since its inception. To those who follow IAIS closely, I am sure that we have witnessed how this institute has managed to keep up to its name to become a centre of excellence for research on Islam and contemporary issues. By virtue of its broad array of research activities, high-quality publications as well as various outreach mechanisms, IAIS Malaysia is all well-gearred to set the benchmark of good scholarship coupled with a practical approach to problem solutions. I hope that the Institute will continue to make significant steps towards the future in service of the Muslim *ummah* and all of humanity.
17. Please do enjoy the seminars that have been carefully curated and arranged

by the organiser, and take benefit from the impressive line of speakers and panellists that will be featured today and tomorrow.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

18. With the invocation of Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, I now officially launch IAIS Malaysia's tenth-anniversary seminar. Thank you. Wassalam wbt.

**Seminar on “The Role of Religion in the Quest for Peaceful
Coexistence”
(IAIS Malaysia, 15 January 2019)**

Wan Naim Wan Mansor

This seminar highlighted the urgent need for religious communities to build towards peaceful coexistence by increasing mutual understanding and cooperation. The seminar was jointly organised by IAIS Malaysia, the Asia West-East Centre (Asia WE), the University of Tehran, and the Cultural Centre of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Malaysia. Three questions guided the sessions: What are the views of major religions regarding peaceful coexistence? Are there shared principles? and, if present, how can these shared principles become a platform to promote peace between religious groups?

Featured speakers included Prof Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Founding CEO of IAIS), Dr Chandra Muzaffar (President of JUST), Dr Mahmoud Vaezi (University of Tehran, Iran), Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid (president of MAPIM), Rev. Dr Sivin Kit (Seminar Teoloji Malaysia), Dr Imtiyaz Yusuf (ISTAC), Assoc Prof Dr Sarjit S. Gill (UPM), and Uthaya Sankar SB (Malaysian author). Some of the recommendations offered by the speakers included: the need for nucleus institutions such as mosques and *musollas* to be an educational platform for religious toleration; the importance of dialogue (*al-hiwar*) as a mechanism for self-introspection and inter-community engagements; the need to offer new Islamic insights from a Southeast Asian perspective; to be aware of the fact that ethnic and religious conflicts have specific contexts that goes beyond religious motives; and the importance of reciprocity in inter-religious relations. The seminar witnessed around 100 participants and many actively engaged in a healthy discussion during the Q&A sessions.