

INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:
INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY
PUTRA MOSQUE, PUTRAJAYA
23rd June 2012
Talking Points

- Previously, I used to begin my speeches, public lecture and my presentations by saying that I am not an academician. It look as if I am unable to say that today because I am an Adjunct Professor of both the Universities involved in organizing this event. However, that would not change me overnight. I believe that my approach and my style will be the same.
- I think the title it is very appropriate. Too often Muslims think that they have to go back in history, live the life of 1,400 years ago in order to be good Muslims. They think that the past is perfect, glorious, a paradise on earth. They think that all the *sahabah* (companions) and even the later generations were all pious and almost sinless. They think that whatever they did was the epitome of human behaviour. They forget that three out of four Khulafa' Al-Rashidin were murdered, that the *sahabah* were at war with each other within a few decades of the death of the prophet s.a.w., that Muslim fought more wars against each other than against non-Muslims. Indeed, if Hadiths could be forged by the thousands and even the *hajrul aswad* was removed to Yemen for about two decades, what else need be said?
- Because of that they tried to imitate everything the Prophet and the *sahabah* did the way they did it, not realizing that it could merely be a matter of culture, non-availability of better things or even fashion of the day and has nothing to do with *Shari'ah*. For example, even when brushing their teeth (which is strongly recommended) they think that it is more Islamic to use the twig of a particular plant that grows in the Arabian desert instead of a modern tooth brush even though made of *halal* material, simply because the Prophet used the twig.
- They look at the distant past the way they look at the moon on a clear moonlit night. It is beautiful from the distance. However, look through a powerful telescope, you will see craters, barren rock and all.
- My point is, we should look at the past as well as the present objectively. And you will find that there are both the good and the bad at any time of history, the difference is only in the degree. So, don't feel hopeless. In fact, we have done better in some ways and in so doing, we have enriched Islamic civilization.
- We are now in Ibnu Sina Hall of Putra Mosque. He was a great doctor, a great scientist during his period. We all respect him. However, that does not mean that the development of medical science had stopped with his death. A fresh medical graduate now knows more than Ibnu Sina regarding medical science, not because he is cleverer but because medical science has developed so

much over the centuries and our students now are lucky to be able to benefit from it. So, we have to keep innovating to keep up with the time.

- Let me say this, had the Muslims not been innovative, Islam could not have spread and the way it did. It could have dwindled and disappeared.
- To me the most innovative of the early Khalifah was Umar Ibn Khattab. Just take the example of how he allowed the owners of the fertile land in Iraq to keep and cultivate their land and pay tax instead of having their land being distributed to the soldiers. He suspended *hudud* during famine. He even innovated the *tarawikh* prayer by doing it in congregation (*jamaah*). No one criticises him. In fact all that he did are accepted as *ijtihad* to be followed but stop there. My question is: if within about two decades from the death of the Prophet, he was already making such innovations, should the *ummah* be deprived of further innovations, within the established principles, for the next 1400 years? Have time stopped? Have things not changed? Have Allah s.w.t. decreed that Muslims born in the last one millennium or more are less intelligent and less pious that they can't even be entrusted to think for themselves within the established principles? I find it hard to believe.
- It is innovation that has made countries won wars, improve living standard and sustain civilization.
- War – We read the story about Genhiz Khan's army having an advantage over their enemies because the handles of their spears were longer. Now we talk about inter-continental ballistic missiles and more. We read about Saladin's cavalry having advantage over that of King Richard the Lion Heart. Why? Simply because Saladin's men wore light clothes and therefore not heavy on their horses and more mobile. On the other hand, imagine the Knights of the Shining Armour mounting on their horses in the hot sandy desert. The horses would sink!
- Without innovation, think of the world population now fighting for the available caves to live in. I need go no further.
- Law: 1. We can have law on a complete subject which never existed during the time of the prophet, yet it is Islamic e.g. Road Traffic Law. "Shariah speed limit".2. We can have law which different from the time of the Prophet, yet it is better and "more Islamic" e.g. law on slavery.
- Malaysia has had its share of innovation and creativity. Let me give you some examples.
- Elected and rotating King.
- Tabung Haji.
- Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA).

- Islamic banking and Islamic finance.
- Shariah Advisory Council.
- Harmonizing of Shariah and Civil law in Islamic finance.
- This is an area in which some of you should think seriously of going into. You don't have to be a Shariah Scholar, or a Hafiz. You should be a banker.
- We live in an era where Islamic *mu'amalat* is going global and being slowly accepted even by non-Muslims, not because of piety but because of money. It does not matter. We live in an era when English is becoming the language of modern *mu'amalat*. I once joked in the Shariah Advisory Council Meeting that if Imam Shafie were to come back into this world, he might have to re-learn modern *mu'amalat*, may be partly in English.
- We also live in an era when the difference of opinions between the *madzhabs* (schools of law) is disintegrating.
- We should be in the main stream of this development. We should not be "an ummah of Lost opportunity" to quote Sheikh Nizam Yaquby, a well-known Shari'ah Advisor on Islamic banking and finance.

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