

Assalamualaikum and good morning

It's a great honour for me to be invited to participate in this very significant regional conference here at UKM.

Tan Sri Dato' Sharifah, Dato' Dr. Saran, Dr. Janice, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to share my views and experiences on a theme which may well be for the 21st century, the most decisive intervention in human building.

At the very onset, I want to also acknowledge the leadership of Malaysians in the Asian and Pacific region on this very significant theme of our collective work.

I recall with great delight and pleasure the opportunities I've had to interact with colleagues in Malaysia over the last five, six years in exploring this theme, including the November 2009 conference at Penang in Universiti Sains Malaysia. In my view Malaysia is uniquely placed in the region to advance innovation and support community engagement of higher education throughout the Asian region. And I am therefore extremely delighted that we have colleagues from ASEAN and from the regional networks, so that we can look forward to Malaysia being a gathering ground for the Asian region as a whole.

ASEAN as a gathering ground, and Asia as a family.

I am also very pleased to be here on the occasion of the launch of AsiaEngage. As a platform, which will push forward the possibility that each one of us can be involved in promoting community engagement in higher education can find a common sphere, common platform a common space. Congratulations for launching AsiaEngage on this very historical occasion.

Over the last few days I've been thinking about being here with you on this occasion. And I've been looking around the world as I see it. I came across several images. I came across an image of Lotus Insignia where you [xx].

I happened to read the diagram from random few days ago that said that the economy of UK continues to be stagnant and unemployment is increasing.

And then I read an article which was even more intriguing; that said that Japan is no longer to be a rich country in a couple of decades. In fact the article said that it will become a middle income (country).

These different stories seem to have certain amount of interconnectedness. Because we are living in a world where not only economies and technologies are interconnected but in a somewhat unpredictable way our futures are in jeopardy. A small event in one part of the world triggers a chain reaction somewhere else. The [xx] crisis some months ago resulted in oil price increase and consequent food (shortage) in Indonesia. And subsidy was being hold on (sic). Tsunami in Japan last year, Indonesians who sending all kinds of things to the pacific coast of North America, the Tsunami triggered its own (other) Tsunami. Around the world, citizens became uncertain of the safety of nuclear energy. And a movement in Southern India - a special movement in Southern India which was protesting the building of a nuclear plant but had lost its support suddenly gaining enormous

public support following the Tsunami in Japan. And aligning exceptional tendencies in Europe and North America over the past two three years; the using red remounting growth in countries like China as exposed recently and several hundred millions Chinese who have migrated to open areas going back to villages with consequent readjustment challenges. I can go on and narrate many more set examples of global interconnectedness but we are all aware of that in today's world. We intuitively understand that connectedness and we are desperately in search of models which can help us to predict the future. But may I submit to you that that desperation is misplaced.

That we have to embrace future as it happens. But we have to prepare ourselves to embrace it in ways which are just, which are sustainable and which are going to lead a legacy for generations to come.

It is to this challenge that I want to present to you the relevance of the work that we are already doing.

Last two to three years what was known as the economic centre of the world; New York, London, Berlin, etc - those societies, those countries are struggling to manage a half per cent to one per cent growth rate.

The shift in the fulcrum of economic development around the world to Asia is demonstrated in 6, 7, 8, 10 per cent growth rate across many countries of the world. Just as Europe and North America had to come to terms with a slower, more recessionary growth prospect, there is an equal challenge for us in Asia to come to terms with rather rapid growth.

What has happened is dramatic and its manifestation on the ground is also consequential. We have created the possibility in our region perhaps for the whole humanity that there is now material, plans, prosperity to enhance our quality of life to unprecedented levels. Including accumulations of wealth - there are more billionaires rising in Asia today than elsewhere in the world.

But within this sea of prosperity, there are not just islands but sometimes main lands of that deprivation. Today in our region we are witnessing the highest rate of inequalities ever witnessed and as we know inequalities in social economic terms are not sustainable in the long run.

We are also witnessing in the world and also in our region what has come to be known as disturbance to the ecological systems. Nature has been a great source of nurture institutionalizations but human actions over the last few decades have disturbed the ecological balance. That disturbance of ecological balance is going at an unprecedented scale in the Asian region. It is moving [xx] alongside rapid economic growth. As we improve the lifestyle of our people, as we improve their longevity, as we improve their nutritional level, we are also consequently creating our air and water and habitation which are increasingly polluted; disease-causing and unprecedented. Therefore restoration of balance, ecological balance is required but is unlikely to happen merely by human action. We have to find a way to tap the native intelligence of the nature itself to restore that balance.

Dr. Sharifah talked about a very important aspect of social contract this morning and we are witnessing from the world and also in our region in Asia, a disconnect between the aspirations of our ordinary citizens and the institutions expected to fulfil the rest. There is a disconnect of social

contract with governments, with industry, with academia, even with NGOs as more and more we discover that aspirations of our young people, aspirations of our folks around the region are not being taken into account as institutions design themselves and function. There is a deficit in the design and operations of major institutions across societies.

It is within this context that we have to ask the question how that restoration of ecological balance, how that overcoming of extreme inequality and how that creation of new social contract will help. I believe that knowledge is going to play a very significant part also. Knowledge in ways that we have not yet learn to tap. It is here that the responsibility of institutions of higher education like universities becomes far more significant than it has been the case before. I deeply appreciate the observation and comments made by both Dr. Sharifah and Dr. Janice because time has come to look at the knowledge role of higher education in a far more integrated and holistic fashion. In order to do so we have to come to terms to the fact that in our society today knowledge is being produced inside and outside universities as well.

In 2008, Global University Network for Innovations (GUNI) got out a global higher education report called Higher Education and the Challenge of Human and Social Development. In that report, pages after pages you discover that the knowledge about human passion, about human institutions is being discovered, rediscovered, created, recreated in a vast range of sites beyond just the universities or formally recognised research institutions. Take the case of ecological sustainability. Take the case of holistic health. Take the case of water harvesting and storage. In each of these areas that I've mentioned there has been practicing knowledge among indigenous people, among the rural people, among grandmothers, great grandmothers which was in the earlier stages they recognised only when sometimes packaged by a pharmaceutical company that decide that "Oh, garlic pills matter," "garlic doesn't matter," "turmeric matters," "clove matters" - all kinds of which were all traditional health practices are now being rediscovered. Yoga has become so popular I'm surprised, in all new stream of training of yoga facilitators around the world. Yoga has become a business - it used to be a health practice. If you look at the way multi-cropping used to be done by farmers who did not go to universities or agricultural science institutions. We tried to shift them into monocultures only twenty years later to acknowledge that that was causing problems about soil fertility but then they said "Oh, no, no, monocultures are not so good" and then discovering multi-cropping to be quite sustainable.

Within the capacity to systematize that knowledge for what we call external generalization validity, that capacity is to support the institutions of higher education can provide. Therefore I would like to suggest that in today's world, the biggest challenge is not to say that we have the knowledge that needs to be mobilized, but to identify sites and location of various moulds and cosmologies of knowledge; discover them, rediscover them, connect them reconnect them, so that new ways of understanding realities and new solutions to those (sic) challenges are made.

This is only possible when we institutions of higher education are open to the possibility that others outside such institutions may as well be legitimate knowledge producers. Historically for a variety of reasons we have appropriated to ourselves the sole distinction and qualification of being knowledge producers. I think that is the first challenge that we need to address as we move forward. Many examples that Janice was giving and those that are mentioned in the books that has been edited by others this morning are examples that initiatives from the institutions of higher education were not

from the basis of what we know that we can teach but rather on the basis of how can we co-construct knowledge, how can we co-discover solutions, problems which are not very simply definable in today's world.

I would like to therefore suggest that we look at the possibility that partnerships in knowledge mobilization, knowledge utilisation, knowledge discovery, rediscovery are likely to be challenging. They're likely to be challenging because we have to learn to deal with dissimilar persons. Just as universities and institutions of higher education may carry a certain [xx] new perspective about communities and community organisations. Let me assure you the worst it is also true, communities and community organisations also have certain perspective of these institutions of higher education.

It is not merely the question of invitation that we will offer and they will say yes because they are also suffering from histories of exclusion and they're likely to be resistant, suspicious and sometimes difficult in dealing with such partnerships. We have to understand that their fears in engaging with institutions of higher education are rooted historically in communities' experience of being put down, of feeling disempowered, feeling worthless - examples that were given by Dr. Sharifah in respect to youth at risks, self-doubt, questions about self-esteem, a lack of confidence in one's own abilities, and what we know and what we can do, those resulting many a times counter-productive to individual and corrected behaviours which we need to understand, create a space to talk about and overcome those histories in division and separations.

Therefore if we have to build this partnerships, we have to be able to absorb the tensions that are inherent in working with the dissimilar others. The tensions which are inherent in working with those who don't use a cognitive, conceptual, theoretical approach to understanding problems but who speak about the problem in an intuitive, emotive, musical artistic manner. They can describe the characteristics of the problem but they can't describe it in three big concepts. We have to use the concepts in a way that they can help in understanding the causes underlying the dynamics of those problems but not concepts of the way which undermines or negate the intuitive, emotive and artistic expression within which resides seeds of knowledge.

It is this challenge, which is a practical challenge of colleagues within institutions of higher education that we need to find a way to address. We believe that it is possible; we believe that it is desirable; we believe that it is the only way forward. It is here that institutional leaders, leaderships of colleagues like Dr. Janice, Dr. Sharifah, Dr. Saran and many others like you. That institutional leadership is critical. It is the leadership which is inclusive and which is bridging. It looks at your own institution but inclusive of those who are surrounding it. The social contract of the institutions of higher education that Dr. Sharifah talked about can only be seen if you have a bridging leadership. If you are only busy looking inside your institution, you will never see the aspirations surrounding the institution.

We have to therefore nurture such bridging leaderships in our institutions of higher education, just as we nurture the bridging leaderships in our community leaders, in our industry leaders as well. I'm certain that such leadership exists. I have seen it around the world but I think we need to encourage that, promote that, nurture that in ways that we may not have done so far.

There is a significant requirement also that Dr. Janice speak eloquently about - influencing policy makers in our countries, in our regions. You would be quite amazed at the kind of support that

several countries and regional bodies provide to this kind of community engagement forum that I was surprised to know. Coming from South Asian context where very little policy support till recently that existed for this, I was surprised to learn that European Union has been for the last ten, eleven years supporting the growth and expansion of what has come to be known as science shop movement in Europe. Science shops came about through the leadership of chemical engineers, physicists, water scientists, biologists who wanted to make their science somehow relevant to addressing the problems of their neighbourhoods where their research labs were located. Science shop became knowledge intermediaries. They were interfaced between communities and research institutions, universities, labs, etc. The problems that science shops suggest were the problems that community leaders, civil society growth, local mayors brought and said "Look we don't know what's going on, can you help us address this problem?" The solution that emerged was not the only scientific solution recommended by the researchers, they were asked to produce more than one possibility because what may be the best solutions may not necessary be the most acceptable (sic) solution, what can be best from the eyes of scientists may actually not so best in the eyes of citizens.

This created a space where science will be driven by the citizens in a way that actual practical problems of water, of pollution, of transport, of traffic, of knowledge, of livelihood could be addressed in the small communities. The science shops movement in Europe is quite different from the way university community engagement has taken place in other parts of the world. Precisely because it is the natural sciences which are the forefront of that engagement and I would like to appeal to you to consider that going forward in our regions certainly, university community engagement should be holistic, inside the university. It is quite natural and often that students of social sciences do social work etc. go out in the field and even sometimes schools of primary healthcare, nursing etc. and relate back to the communities.

But it's not so common that chemists, biologists, mechanical engineers, physicists etc. also view their work just as those who teach literature, that there is a link between what knowledge they are teaching, discovering rediscovering, is also knowledge that is relevant for community engagement. In that sense, holistic, institution-wide engagement has to be nurtured and not merely in so called social of humanities parts of the university.

I raise this question because moving forward, the biggest issue of social responsibility of universities and higher education institutions is not going to be just about how they teach young students and what they learn after they finish. That question is already asked; that's not the question of the future.

What knowledge is being taught, what skills are students learning, do they have a role in society, are they only submitting to their own self-interest and vocational and professional interest, are they also behaving as good citizens. Those are the questions that are already being asked. Going forward in the next 10, 20 years the questions that will be asked are going to be questions about what kind of knowledge, what kind of science, with what ethical and moral underpinnings we produce that science and knowledge. Don't forget that time (sic), - GINO project, don't forget the projects that took place in Manhattan in 1940s which affected Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There were scientific knowledge producing initiatives but they somehow lost track of ethical and moral underpinnings. Increasingly all citizens, citizens who have never been to universities or institutions of higher education are going to ask that question. That can be the question about social accountability, not

merely social responsibility, social accountability; how does your research, how does your knowledge production contribute to at least the principle of, do no harm if not do some good and that question is increasingly on our table. Research questions are increasingly asking that of research proposals - ethical questions are on the table and I think they will become increasingly important. It is therefore in our interest to work with our new scholars, to work with our new researchers and to help them understand that the science and knowledge that they are producing is contextual in the way human exists in the societies and not merely isolated in the small labs, antiseptic as they may look like.

I do want to also take this occasion to mention to you how honoured I feel that this is the first time in public I'm speaking about the forthcoming UNESCO chair on community-based research and social accountability of higher education. As Dr. Sharifah mentioned, as has been mentioned in my introduction, Dr. Budd Hall in University of Victoria, Canada and I attended the conference of second higher education conference of UNESCO in July 2009 and we realised that a lot of people present there were working on this issue but UNESCO's own declaration somehow did not capture this part of the work. If it was captured, it was seen as a third mission, or something you do after you finish your main business, maybe before you go to sleep and have a cup of tea but you had your sumptuous dinner, dessert and all that, possibly in some part of the world a glass of wine too but that's not the way we are looking at engagement, that's not the way we are looking at relationships between institutions of higher education and the communities that surround them, communities around the world. We are looking at it in a more integrated, more organic and holistic manner.

So we work with the UNESCO colleagues there, and we work with GUNI and other networks present there, African association of universities present there, to include in the announcement in the declaration of UNESCO after 2009 two significant principles; 1) valuing, respecting, encouraging, nurturing indigenous knowledge and 2) creating mutually respectful partnerships between communities and institutions of higher educations. Mutually respectful, not necessarily equal, not necessarily identical but just mutually respectful.

Following that partial success, in fact we've encouraged them to approach UNESCO to consider establishing a chair. We approached UNESCO in doing through our UNESCO commissions and also through the documents, colleagues in Paris and we heard a few weeks ago, informally, that UNESCO has approved a chair on community based research and social responsibility of higher education. And Dr. Budd Hall in University of Victoria, Canada and I, we will be co-chairs of this initiative. As bureaucracies go it will take a few more months before all of this is operationalized, I don't have a [xx] care about wasting time giving [xx] UNESCO chair but that doesn't really matter. I want to use this occasion, this conference to invite you to look at UNESCO chair as an opportunity, as a mechanism over the next 3, 4 years to recognise as Dr. Sharifah said, to forcefully present a vision of engagement that we cherish and we feel is rooted in the future that we would like to see for our citizens, around Asia, around the world.

This may include opportunities for capacity building of new researchers. But I would encourage us to think about capacity building of community leaders and civil societies, activists as well. They also need capacity enhancement to work in partnerships. They also need support in articulating and systematizing their knowledge that they have gained in their practice. That is not going to happen on

their own. And therefore capacity enhancement is one issue that we could work on together- there are many ideas that are already floating.

Second issue is dialogue with our policy makers, dialogue with our national governments, with our research councils in our countries, with regional bodies. This is where ASEAN's network can be very productive, dialogues with those who can shape support and mainstream, [xx] encouraging work. We also hope to see this as an opportunity whereby networks like PASCAL, GACER, main actors in the community. They tend to pay attention to this issue and will find a way to harmonize their activities. We all do different things and that's our strength. If we all were doing the same thing it would be repetition.

So finally let me share with you a story that is my experience when I was doing field research for my dissertation. As you may have seen from my biodata I was very highly qualified as a professional electronics engineer, MBA, doing my PHD in management because I needed to understand with management lens the problems of rural poverty and development in India. And I spent a year, I was very prepared to entertain profound research with predetermined research instruments that I've learned and mastered. I was even using computers in those days.

It took me precisely one week to figure out how ignorant I was and those I consider as stupid because they were illiterate from knowledge. I didn't know how to live in areas which are rural. I didn't know how agricultural took place. I didn't know how food was grown, the food that I used to feed my children, my family and least of all I knew that water needed to be corrected, that it did not come out of taps. I was having a great difficulty in unlearning that all things which I've taken for granted. I decided one day that I'm going to now start collecting data. And I ran around with my predetermined, predesigned questionnaire. Most of the people I approach who had already known me for a few weeks would shy away every time I ask them questions related to my questionnaire.

And I couldn't understand that till one day an elderly man caught up with me and said "Sir, you look a bit disturbed." I said "No, nobody wants to give me data. I told you I come here for my PHD, to do my thesis but if I don't do my PHD I'll be doomed." He said "Yes, yes you are coming here for PHD but why is nobody giving you data?" I said "Look, you know I have this questionnaire and even translated in local language and asking them questions they say they are busy they will talk to me tomorrow, nobody talk to me tomorrow." He said "Ahh ok. You've been here for a few months already, few weeks?" I said yes. "Can you see?" I said yes. "Can you smell?" Of course. "Taste?" Yes. "Hear?" Of course. "Those things don't cost you data? Only that what gets into your sheet of paper is data?"

I profound (sic) on that. Anyway I started taking notes as I was observing qualitative all that, words that I learnt later. Those were not the phrases that I learnt in my training of research methodology but the most significant came when I said "That thank you very much, now I'm going back, it was a good time etc. etc." They gave me a special meal. Just before I go back, you know leave the next morning, the old man asked "Son, but what you learnt? Can you share your..." he didn't use the phrase finding but that was what it meant. I said "Oh I thought I would write them in my thesis and submit them. What do you mean by sharing what I've learnt?" Of course we got into conversation and we talked about it. But I kept on thinking that it was so natural for him to ask for the community,

that I should be accountable to them for the knowledge I have gained. That was so stupid of me to see as an intrusion in my research enterprise.

I don't want to repeat that in future. Let's work together and make it possible for next generation of researchers.

Thank you very much.