

**ROYAL ADDRESS  
BY  
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS  
SULTAN NAZRIN MUIZZUDDIN SHAH**

**AT THE  
KUALA LUMPUR SUMMIT 2019**

**DATE: SATURDAY, 21 DECEMBER 2019**

**TIME: 10.00 AM**

**VENUE: KUALA LUMPUR CONVENTION CENTRE**

***“Development in Achieving National Sovereignty: The  
Plight of the Nationless”***

Honourable Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

1. It gives me great pleasure to address you all today on this, the final day of the KL Summit 2019. I listened with great interest to the Summit Declaration that was just read. I would like to congratulate The Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of KL Summit, Tun Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad, for the impressive outcome of the conference. The declaration can be an important guide and compass for national planning as well as for further international consultation and collaboration. What it must not be allowed to become is another document that gathers dust on the shelf.
2. I understand that this summit was first convened back in 2014 as a forum in which to raise and seek solutions to the major challenges facing the Muslim world. The hope was that these conversations might ultimately spur on the revival of Islamic civilization. That remains a goal of the summit to this day. Over the past few days, leaders from across the Muslim world have engaged in important discussions, sharing their uniquely insightful and illuminating perspectives on subjects including politics, education, prosperity and technology, in relation to that most vital of topics, development. Through these as well as the other, more informal conversations enabled by this gathering, this year's KL Summit will undoubtedly have contributed to the building of bridges, and the furthering of progress, throughout the global Islamic community.
3. In the many countries represented at the summit, as well as the world leaders and scholars gathered here today, we see both the great variety and incredible unity of the *ummah*. We are all of us united by our Islamic faith. At the same time, we bring diverse experiences and unique ideas to the table. We come from countries which differ in size, demography, and political structure. This diversity can only serve to enrich the conversation, offer new perspectives on challenges common to the Islamic world, and improve our understanding of national and regional difficulties, so that we might better support one another. Remember the famous dictum taken seriously by the early

Muslims: *rahmatul-ummah fî ikhtilâf al-a'immah* (The mercy of this *ummah* lies precisely in the diversity of their leaders).<sup>1</sup>

4. This KL Summit has centred around the 7 Pillars mentioned earlier, namely: Sustainable Development; Integrity and Good Governance; Culture and Identity; Peace, Justice and Freedom; Sovereignty, Security and Defence; Trade and Investment; and Technology and Governance. These have all been identified as areas essential to the furthering of development and progress in the Islamic world. Thus, a failure to translate conversation into policies and action – a failure to capitalize on the dialogues and relationships begun at this summit – will result, quite simply, in nothing more than a talkfest. It is my sincerest hope that when this summit next meets, it will be to focus on the progress that has been made in implementation, and the challenges that remain.
5. So what might some of the challenges be? Well, it is my belief that the gravest challenges facing the world can be summarized under the “Three Ps”: that is prosperity, the planet, and its people. The issue of prosperity – how to increase wealth and eradicate poverty – has already been much discussed at this year’s summit thanks to its focus on development. The planet, a subject very close to my heart, must be increasingly prioritized in development initiatives, because *unsustainable* development, which damages the climate and the natural world, is not really development at all. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals provide an excellent roadmap in this area, and in the past, I have discussed the incredible ethical overlap of the SDGs with the teachings of the Holy Qur’an at some length.<sup>2</sup> However, it is the final “P” – that of people – that I would like to focus on.
6. Over the past few days, the end goal of our conversations has been how development can enhance the sovereignty of the nation. However, as I reflected on the subject of *national* sovereignty in the run up to this summit, I found myself repeatedly coming back to the question: but what about the nation/less? What about those members of the *ummah*, our Muslim brothers and sisters who have been forced to abandon their homes and flee their homelands because of hardship, conflict and persecution?
7. We are facing a crisis of mounting severity. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports more displaced persons in the world now than at any time since the end of the Second World War. There are around 70 million displaced persons worldwide. Of these almost 26 million are refugees. Nearly 10 million of the refugees – well over a third – come from Muslim-majority countries.<sup>3</sup> They have been rendered nationless by the failure of states to care for them and by the bombs and bullets of war. Millions, including children, women and the elderly face shocking abuse, suffering and

---

<sup>1</sup> Al-‘Uthmânî, *Rahmat al-ummah fî ikhtilâf al-a'immah* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Asad, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Sultan Nazrin Shah, “Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals through Islamic Finance”, Royal Address at the Dinner to Celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Bank Negara Malaysia’s Shariah Advisory Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (12 December 2017).

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance” (accessed 20 December 2019): <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>. Approximately 9.4 million refugees come from Syria and Afghanistan combined.

deprivation. How might we build and act on our conversations about national sovereignty and development in order to help them?

8. Finding an enduring resolution to the refugee problem will require addressing the root reasons why populations become displaced or refugees. This Summit has in fact just done some of that. The comprehensive and sustainable development that we focused on will help eradicate poverty and want, and improve livelihoods. It will put in place healthy political institutions and administrative structures that produce good governance and protect the legitimate rights of all citizens irrespective of ethnicity, religion or sect. It will create just laws and effective agencies to maintain peace and ensure security. Comprehensive development will also yield the necessary resources to provide for effective defence against external aggression and subversion. But for the families and individuals who have fled their country out of desperation and in fear of their lives, whether from Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq or from other countries decimated by war and persecution, they cannot wait for enduring solutions that may take years or even may never come. Their struggle, quite simply, is just to survive. So what can we do for the refugees and the displaced who are most in need of our help? How can we use the progress that we continue to make in the areas of development and national sovereignty to help the desperately needy beyond our own borders, to give homes to the homeless, and voices to the voiceless? Because at present, the harsh reality is that Islamic nations simply are not doing enough.
9. That is not to say that no Muslim-majority countries are doing their share to alleviate the crisis. Indeed, Turkey is currently hosting over 3.7 million refugees, more than any other country. The Lebanon is hosting 1.5 million refugees. With a population of 5.9 million, that is the highest number of refugees per capital. Jordan, Pakistan and Iran, too, are countries hosting vast numbers of refugees.
10. But the Muslim world could do much more, particularly as it develops and grows in wealth and power. Many Muslim-majority nations are more affluent now. Many more of us could therefore be working much harder to raise awareness, to contribute to the global dialogue, and to provide the financial and material support that humanitarian aid efforts so desperately need. We have a vital responsibility to our nationless Muslim brothers and sisters, and we must start to do better at reaching out and offering them homes and hope, just as the Ansar hosted the Muhajirun during the time of the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wassalam.
11. This is an issue about which I have spoken in the past, particularly in relation to the Syrian crisis. What we have witnessed in that crisis is Syrians desperate to seek refuge not in nearby Muslim nations, but instead in Europe. I vividly remember one Syrian refugee back in 2015 eloquently commenting that, "we will tell our children that Syrian migrants fled their country to come to Europe when Makkah and Muslim lands were closer to them". I was also deeply moved by the words of another, comparing the German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Abyssinian Christian King Negus, who famously sheltered Muslim refugees during their first Hijrah in the time of Prophet Muhammad sallallahu 'alayhi wassalam.

12. And I hope that the world will never forget the appalling, heart-breaking image of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned as he and his family attempted to cross the Mediterranean sea, refugees fleeing to Europe. They sometimes say that a picture speaks a thousand words, but I think that this picture left us with no words at all. This was a heartrending tragedy. There are surely many, many more, neither seen by the world nor heard by it. For Muslims everywhere, the enduring message should be this: that Muslims rendered nationless should not have to hazard the perilous journey to Europe in order to feel safe, comfortable and secure. There should be safe refuge for them closer to home.
13. The essential question, then, is this: how do we give them hope? Well, one of the reasons that Islamic refugees seek shelter in Europe is that they believe Europe will afford them greater opportunities; better access to education; routes to financial security; and, crucially, the freedom, dignity, and human rights they were stripped of in their home countries. In this sense, our focus on development at this summit has huge potential to improve the lives of Muslim refugees the world over. As Muslim nations become more prosperous, more stable, and more developed in terms of technology, education, and work opportunities, they become better placed to offer hopeful, safe and productive lives to refugees seeking fresh hope and new homes. They also become more able to fund humanitarian efforts, and to command greater power and sway on the world stage, in order to ensure that nations pay attention to the crisis as well.
14. For these possibilities to be realized, though, we have to care about what lies beyond our own borders, even as we pursue national development agendas. Tackling the hardships faced by nationless Muslims the world over has to become a priority: we must be more involved in the conversation. That this is a compelling issue was made all too clear by the first ever Global Refugee Forum that was held in Geneva earlier this week. There is increasing awareness around the world that now, more than ever, is the time to come together, to earnestly engage and, crucially, to take the necessary measures to resolve the biggest humanitarian crisis the world has faced.
15. As Muslims, it is my sincerest hope that we can lead the way in helping our nationless brothers and sisters rather than lag behind. Summits such as this, which build bridges between Islamic nations across the world, could act as a springboard for Muslim countries to act more earnestly to tackle the problem. Indeed, I believe that a great deal of positive change could be achieved if the plight of the nationless is foregrounded at this Summit going forward.
16. In this spirit of global togetherness and shared responsibilities, I am happy to announce that, at its next gathering, this KL Summit will henceforth be known as the “Perdana Dialogue”. This is, I believe, a hugely significant name change, reaffirming this summit’s commitment to the power of collaboration and conversation, while at the same time emphasizing the responsibility that befalls us all, to ensure that the outcomes of these discussions are implemented without delay.

17. In that vein, I would also take this moment to acknowledge the importance of the Chair's Statement on the KL Summit 2019. This declaration records and affirms the many laudable aims and achievements of this summit, concluding with a "pledge to achieve the objectives and targets of the Kuala Lumpur Summit, united by a common determination to revive the Islamic Civilization for the present and future generation of the *Ummah*".<sup>4</sup> Let us take this mutual commitment to transform words into action most seriously. Let us not neglect this pledge to continue the good work we have started.
  
18. In ending, I would like to recall the words of the renowned 20th century physicist, Albert Einstein. Himself a Jewish refugee forced to flee Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Einstein once said that "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without *doing anything*".<sup>5</sup>

Honorable Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

19. I hereby declare the KL Summit 2019 closed.

Thank you.

---

<sup>4</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, "Chair's Statement on KL Summit 2019" (21 December 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Einstein's tribute to Pablo Casals (30 March 1953), in Josep M. Corredor *Conversations with Casals* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1957), 11; translated from *Conversations avec Pablo Casals: souvenirs et opinions d'un musicien* (1955).