

KOFI ANNAN

**FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF UN
NOBEL PEACE LAUREATE**

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"SHARING THE DIVIDENDS OF DEVELOPMENT WITH THE THOUGHTS ON MALAYSIAN MERDEKA"

Let me begin by saying how deeply moved and honoured I am to be giving the inaugural Khazanah Lecture to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Malaysian Merdeka.

It has been my privilege to serve with Malaysians throughout my career in the United Nations – in peacekeeping, in humanitarian assistance, in administration and peace building. On this historic occasion, I wish to pay tribute to all your leaders – both past and present – for Malaysia's strong support for the principles and institutions of multilateralism.

Let me also thank you, Razali, for your warm introduction. The last time we shared a stage, before such an attentive audience, was when you swore me in as seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations. But today, I speak as a private Ghanaian citizen after a long, long time.

Fifty years ago, Malaysia and my country Ghana gained their independence. Both countries looked to the future with a great deal of excitement, certain that a future of freedom, justice and prosperity would be theirs. Today we can look back on our achievements and disappointments, and look ahead with a clear vision.

Malaysia has been a very fortunate country because of the way it has developed from its inception as a nation. Malaysia's was, uniquely in the annals of empire, a tranquil and orderly transfer of power. Nationalist passion was channelled through town council elections under colonial supervision rather than down the barrel of a gun. This gift of peace has been carefully nurtured and preserved.

There are good reasons for this. The complex mathematics of ethnicity and religion in the country meant that a delicate system for managing pluralism has

evolved. Malaysia shares borders with more countries in its region than any other, and yet has managed to avoid conflict with any of them. Few other countries in the world have been so consistently at peace with such a diverse mix of race and religion.

Less well noted has been Malaysia's ability to develop and avoid the stark inequalities which have dogged other countries that gained independence at the same time. There is a robust middle class, a viable social protection system and reasonably advanced human security infrastructure.

Endowed with all these advantages, the question is 'what can Malaysia do for its neighbourhood and the wider world'? How can the dividends of development, manifest in the well-being of Malaysians, be shared more widely with the global community?

I believe this is important for three reasons: First, we are all in the same boat. More than ever before, the human race faces global problems – from poverty and inequality to nuclear proliferation, from climate change to avian flu, from terrorism to HIV and AIDS, from ethnic cleansing and genocide to trafficking of people and organised crime. All of us need to come together and work out global solutions.

Second: the three freedoms which all human beings crave – freedom from want; freedom from fear, conflict or large scale violence; and freedom from discrimination, arbitrary or degrading treatment, are closely interrelated.

And third: there is no security without development. There is no long-term development without security. And no society can long remain secure or prosperous without respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Neither one of them (development, security or human rights) can advance very far without the other two. Indeed, anyone who speaks forcefully for human rights but does nothing about security and development undermines both his credibility and his cause.

Poverty in particular remains both a source and consequence of rights violations. Yet if we are serious about human deprivation, we must also demonstrate that we are serious about protecting human dignity, and vice versa.

This is why we have a collective responsibility to promote effective development and why I believe Malaysia is uniquely positioned to play a catalytic role on the international stage.

Firstly, I would say that in a world dangerously divided by religious faith, there is an urgent need for dialogue. Malaysia's enviable system of religious pluralism can play an important role.

An embrace of differences – differences in opinion, in culture, in belief, in way of life – has long been a driving force of human progress. Thus it was in this country, whose rich history has been largely shaped by geography.

More than 500 years ago, Arab, Chinese and Indian traders plied their trade throughout the Malay Archipelago. They were replaced by Portuguese, Dutch and British traders, later colonial occupiers, in search of spices and safe harbour.

Each left their economic, social and environmental footprints behind in the communities they encountered. There was interaction and competition. Yet interaction did not only take the form of conflict. There was also "dialogue" as different cultures and civilisations learned from each other.

Regrettably, several centuries later, our own globalised era is marked by rising intolerance, extremism and violence against the "other". Closer proximity and improved communications have often led not to mutual understanding and friendship, but to mutual mistrust. Many people, particularly in the developing world, have come to fear the global village both as a cultural onslaught and as an economic drain.

The terror attacks of 9/11, war and turmoil in the Middle East, ill-considered words and drawings have all helped to reinforce this perception, and have inflamed tensions between different peoples and cultures. At the very time when international migration has brought unprecedented numbers of people of a different creed or culture to live as fellow citizens, the misconceptions and stereotypes underlying the idea of a "clash of civilisations" have come to be more and more widely shared.

We live, as never before, cheek by jowl, bombarded by many different influences and ideas. But demonisation of the "other" has proved the path of least resistance, when a healthy dose of introspection would better serve us all. After all, much of the current discontent in the Islamic world feeds off the Muslim

Ummah's own shortcomings. At the same time, the West invites criticism through its perceived doublespeak on issues of human rights and democracy.

In the 21st century, we remain hostage to our sense of grievances, and to feelings of entitlement. Our narratives have become our prison, paralysing discourse and hindering understanding.

Thus, many people throughout the world, particularly in the Muslim world, see the West as a threat to their beliefs and values, their economic interests, their political aspirations. Evidence to the contrary is simply disregarded or rejected as incredible.

Likewise, many in the West dismiss Islam as a religion of extremism and violence, despite a history of relations between the two in which commerce, cooperation and cultural exchange have played at least as important a part as conflict.

It is vital that we overcome these resentments, and establish relations of trust between communities.

Malaysia can help do this by showing a very different face to the world, one where differing people of different faiths coexist peacefully.

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi's ideas for a "civilisational Islam" urge us all to return to the humanistic principles of faith. "Islam Hadhari", with its roots in the early Islamic humanism of Ibn Khaldun, emphasises development, consistent with the tenets of Islam and focused on enhancing the quality of life. It aims to strike a healthy balance between religious dogma and the mastery of knowledge needed to tackle modern global challenges.

Prime Minister Abdullah's ideas give him considerable legitimacy in a world where some people prefer to wield faith as a weapon. We must start by reaffirming – and demonstrating – that the problem is never the faith – it is the faithful, and how they behave towards each other. We must stress the basic values that are common to all religions: compassion, solidarity, respect for the human person, and the golden rule "do as you would be done by".

At the same time, we need to get away from stereotypes, generalisations and preconceptions, and take care not to let crimes committed by individuals or small groups dictate our image of an entire people, an entire region, or an entire religion.

It is hard to find currency for the so-called “clash of civilisations” in Malaysia, where Muslims have for the last three decades helped finance and build cutting-edge electronic technology associated with the non-Muslim West in the science parks of Penang. As elsewhere in the world, here in Malaysia, migration, integration and technology have brought different races, cultures and ethnicities closer together, which brings me to the second way in which I believe Malaysia can share the dividends of development.

Where different ethnic communities are divided and in conflict, as in many countries in Africa, Europe and Asia, Malaysia provides a unique model for harmonious coexistence.

At its birth, Malaysia inherited a population principally composed of three different communities, Malay, Chinese and Indian, none of them commanding a significant overall majority. It was decided early on to manage the mix rather than to forcibly assimilate people. Forced assimilation, as we have seen in places like Rwanda and the Balkans can set the stage for massive human rights abuse and crimes against humanity.

In the case of Malaysia, religious, cultural and linguistic boundaries were protected, not threatened; political rights were granted and a social contract negotiated. Conflict was avoided.

Mind you, not everybody wants a society so clearly defined by race and religion, which remains the case here in Malaysia. But where there is a need to govern relations between groups that wish to retain their distinct identity, Malaysia has a lot of experience to share in terms of fostering harmony, building consensus and steering clear of conflict.

Thirdly, with poverty and inequality so widespread in the developing world, Malaysia has important knowledge to impart to less developed countries. You may think that joining the ranks of developed nations, as Malaysia is expected to do within the next 12 years, brings certain benefits. It does – but it also carries obligations. For in today’s world, not only are we responsible for each other’s security, but we are also – in some measure – responsible for each other’s welfare.

I do believe that the divide between developed and developing nations would be more easily bridged if there was stronger South-South cooperation. In this regard, Malaysia’s unique experience of development offers a more accessible and appropriate model for African countries to learn from.

By this, I mean it is important for Malaysia (as well as China and India) to transfer

its capabilities and experience, and support African countries in their efforts to take “the high road” to development. How, for example, to invest in education, develop cost- effective social safety nets, build appropriate housing and health systems; how to promote agricultural productivity, rural development and harness savings.

These are some of the vital components of modern Malaysia that seem easy to take for granted when you gaze at the Kuala Lumpur skyline with its gleaming office towers clad in glass and steel. You have much to be proud of: most Malaysians are financially secure and there is a relatively high degree of social mobility.

I can see this more clearly perhaps because I know that my own country Ghana, which gained independence five months before Malaya, started out with a lot in common.

Both independent countries were blessed with rich natural resources, significant gold and foreign currency reserves, strong British legal and political institutions, and similar educational systems. Their per capita income levels were roughly level.

By the turn of this century the two countries had very little in common. Malaysia’s GNP per capita income of almost US\$4,000 was about 13 times greater than Ghana’s of under US\$300. Ghana has remained largely an agricultural country. Malaysia has become highly industrialised.

Some studies highlight the advantages Malaysia enjoyed, such as proximity to more stable and prosperous markets. But I prefer to think that geography is not sufficient a reason and Ghana could have made more of its naturally endowed advantages if it was better governed, as Malaysia was.

I do not support the argument that political stability can only be assured if freedoms are curbed, which some would say has been a price Malaysia has paid for prosperity. If only we in Ghana had more opportunity to learn from Malaysia.

I would very gladly have traded the palm oil trees we gave Malaysia in the 1950s for a framework of parliamentary government that exercised democracy more consistently.

All this is easier said than done, you will say. I hear voices complaining about the

iniquities of the international system that makes it hard for Malaysia's voice to be heard. But this should not slow down efforts to develop networks to promote appropriate development strategies. More than a decade ago, Malaysian companies reached out to parts of Africa where conflict needs resolving and economic conditions are in urgent need of improvement. I recognise that during the economic boom of a decade ago, Malaysia felt more confident about itself, but 10 years after the Asian Financial Crisis I see every sign that growth in this region is now more secure and robust.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in a time when there are those who would urge mistrust and confrontation with the Muslim world, Malaysia stands out as a shining example of progress and prosperity. It is a leader in the Muslim world, and yet I detect a reticence to invoke this convening power. You should not be afraid to do so for you will find an eager audience. The world is looking for new voices of moderation and reason; don't wait to be asked.

It is equally important that countries like Malaysia, with security and peace established at home, step up to the plate and defend human rights and the rule of law – what I call the third pillar of the United Nations, on par with development and security.

Of course, protecting and promoting human rights is first and foremost a national responsibility. But many states need help in doing this, and the UN system has a vital role to play.

One of my priorities as Secretary-General was to try making human rights central to all the UN's work. And in my view, the most pressing challenge today is the need to give real meaning to the principle of "Responsibility to Protect".

Adopted by world leaders less than two years ago, this doctrine means, in essence, that respect for national sovereignty can no longer be used as an excuse for inaction in the face of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Some governments have tried to win support in the global South by caricaturing responsibility to protect, as a conspiracy by imperialist powers to take back the hard-won national sovereignty of formerly colonised peoples. This is utterly false.

We must do better. We must develop the responsibility to protect into a powerful

international norm that is not only quoted but put into practice, whenever and wherever it is needed. I hope that Malaysia's voice will be strong in this debate.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is much to be done, and more creative ways needed to advance the global agenda of development and human rights. I have mentioned some of the ways I think Malaysia can make a vital contribution. There are many others.

Every year when Malaysians celebrate their Independence Day, they shout the word "Merdeka". This word "freedom" resonates powerfully in the history of all nations, and is one of the most motivating of all collective human instincts. Malaysia has been lucky enough to enjoy this freedom with virtually no interruption, a rare blessing in this world. Long may you continue to build on and share the fruits of your freedom and prosperity.

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